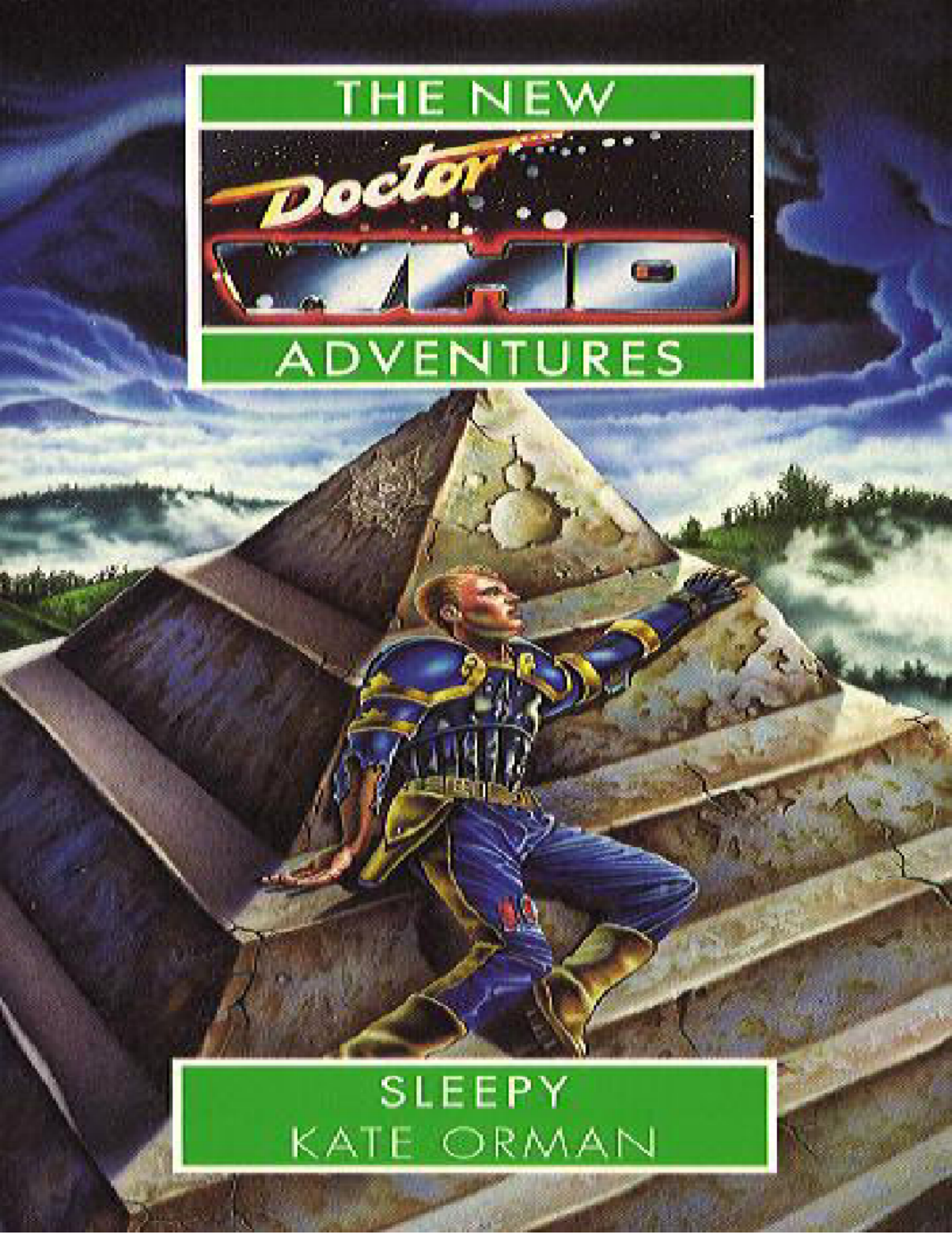
THE NEW

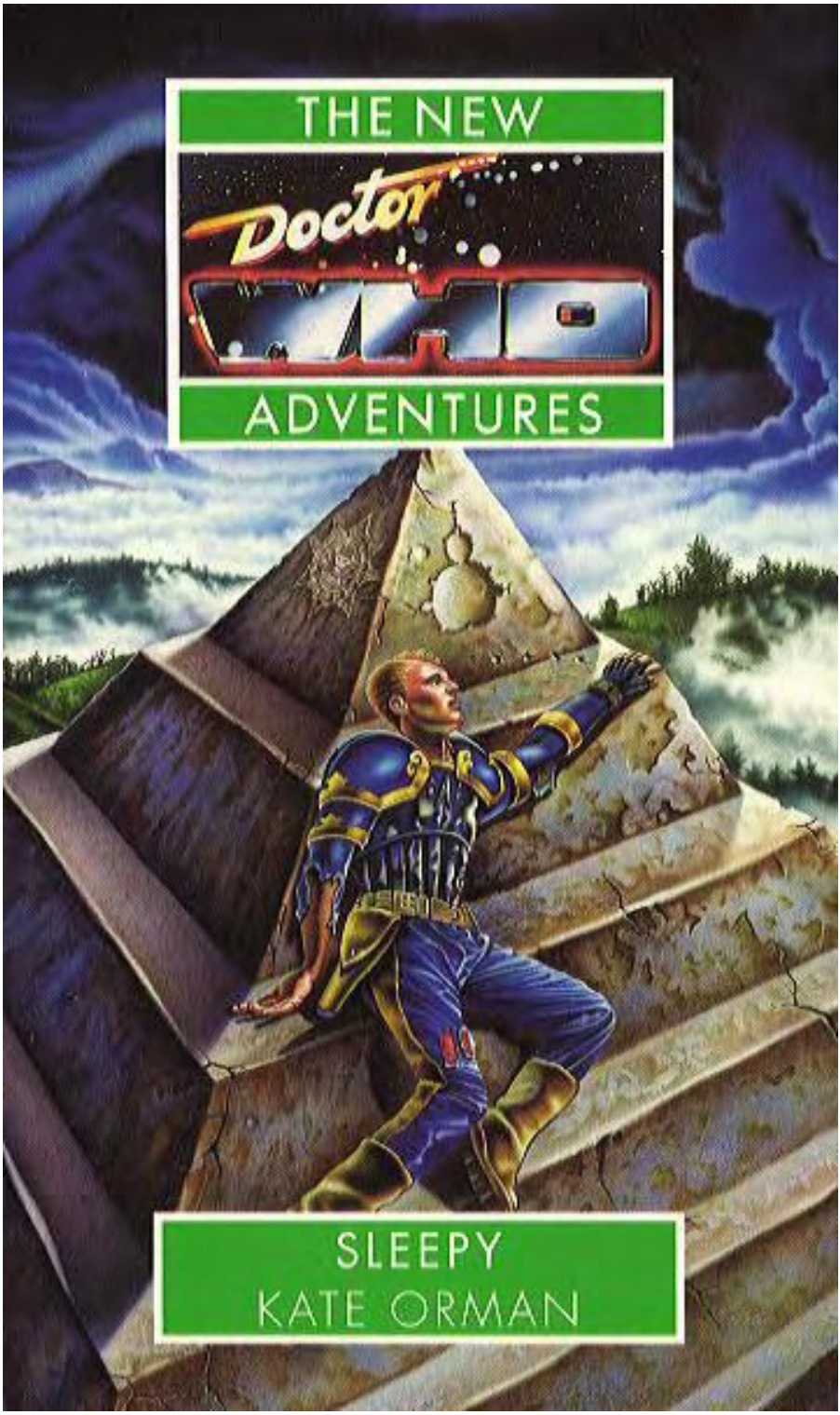
Doctor Who

ADVENTURES



SLEEPY

KATE ORMAN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KATE ORMAN

'Stay the hell out of my mind,' hissed Forrester. 'Just stay away from me.' She turned and stalked out of the room.
Chris put his head in his hands.

The Earth colony on Yemaya 4 is a very ordinary place. The colonists spend their time farming, building homes, raising families.

But when the Doctor and his companions arrive they find a virus sweeping through the population, unleashing the colonists' latent psychic powers. The Doctor and Chris fall prey to the infection, and discover telepathy is not the only symptom. Chris is unable to resist the call of an ancient place of sacrifice, while Roz and Benny travel back in time to the origin of the virus, and uncover a desperate bid for immortality.

And all the while the Doctor is playing a dangerous game with troopers of the Dione-Kisumu company, who have come either to reclaim their stolen biotechnology – or to sterilize the planet.

Full-length original novels based on the longest running science-fiction television series of all time, the BBC's **Doctor Who**. The New Adventures take the TARDIS into previously unexplored realms of space and time.

Kate Orman is (drums fingers) *still* the only New Adventures writer who isn't (a) male, and (b) British. Her previous books, **The Left-Handed Hummingbird** and **Set Piece**, also have pyramids in them.

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KATE ORMAN

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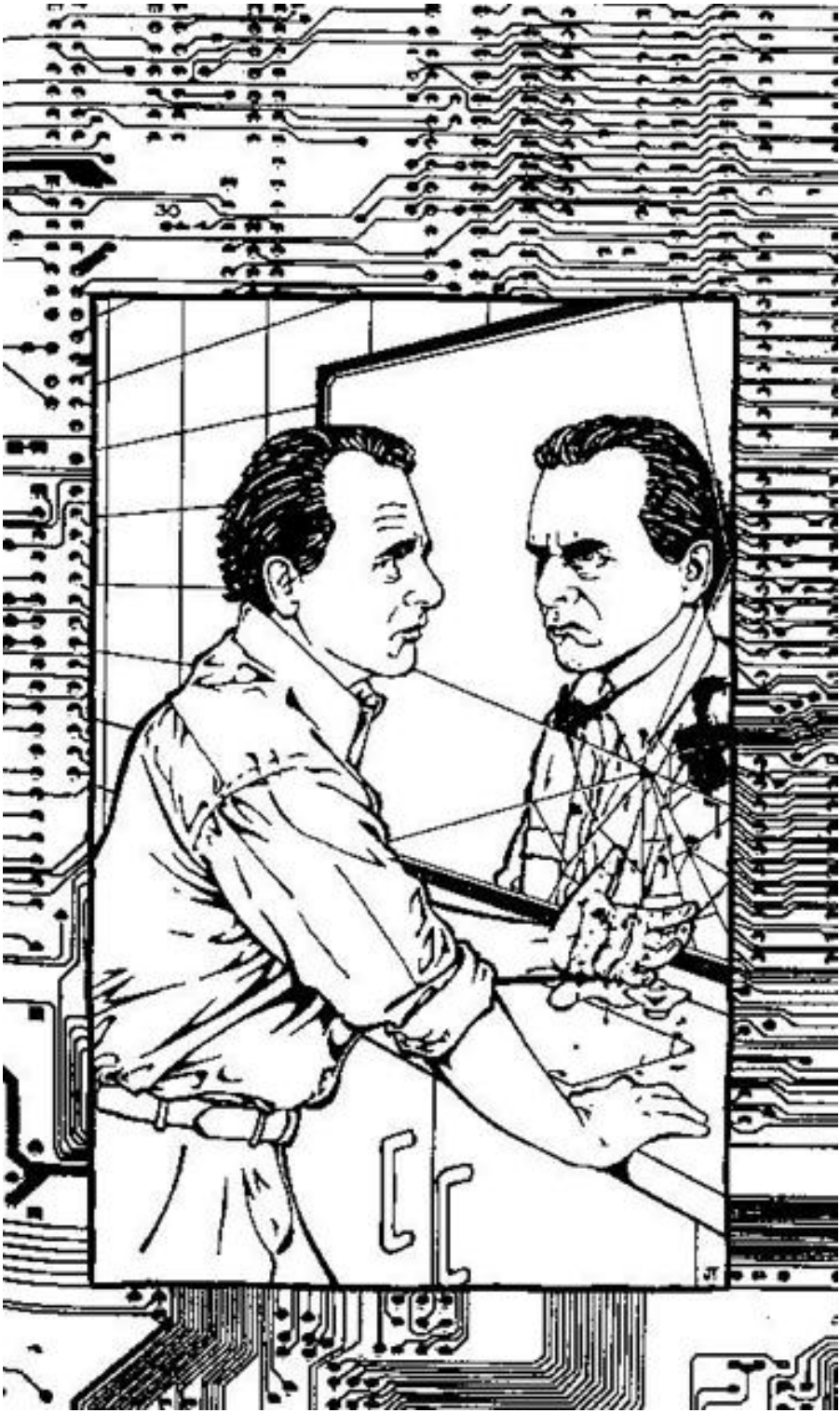
A round of applause, ladies and gentlemen, for the read-through team! Put your hands together for Todd Beilby, Nathan Bottomly, Steven Caldwell (discover of the Milton Principle), David Carroll, Mel and Sarah Fitzsimmons-Groenewegen, Stephen Groenewegen, Neil Hogam. Andrew Orman, Fiona Simms and Kayla Ward.

The quote from the *Good News Bible* on page 83 is used with the kind permission of the Bible Society in Australia.

Beware the fury of a patient man. (John Dryden, *Absalom and Achitophel*)



Part One

Parmi les morts, it y en a toujours quelques-uns qui désolent les vivants.

(Among the dead there are those who still trouble the living.) (Denis Diderot, *Le Neveu de Rameau*)

1 Home by the Sea

The Doctor was having a nightmare.

He collided with a metal surface, the breath whooshing out of his lungs. Someone pushed him against the curved wall, leaning on him with their weight, while someone else pulled his arms behind his back.

He twisted his head around, awkwardly, trying to catch his breath, and looked right into Roz Forrester's eyes. Her mouth was drawn into a tight line. There was no mercy in her face.

She pulled him away from the wall. ‘What are you doing?’ he gasped, realizing that his wrists had been cuffed behind him.

Chris Cwej was a huge silhouette in front of the sun. The Doctor squinted into the hot alien light. Everything was intense and blurry at once. ‘We’re not going to hurt you,’

rumbled the big man.

‘You *are* hurting me,’ protested the Doctor, as Forrester dragged him awkwardly backwards. ‘Where are we going?’

Forrester didn’t answer. Cwej followed, chewing on his lip, as she pulled her captive along.

There was a door in the wall. The noonday sun was glinting fiercely from solar cells on the roof of the habitat dome. Cwej did something to a control by the door.

‘No,’ said the Doctor.

A great wave of panic caught him, and he yelled. He tried to pull out of Forrester’s grasp, kicking against the metal wall.

If he went inside the dome he was going to *die* — he would die, his friends were going to *kill* him...

'For Goddess' sake!' shouted Forrester. The Doctor snapped his head backwards and upwards, but only managed to bounce his skull off her chin. They both yelped.

Cwej reached down and took the Doctor's face in his hand, firmly. The Time Lord felt the points of Cwej's nails pressing into his skin. 'Stop it,' he said. 'We're not going to hurt you.'

It took both of them to drag him through the door.

Inside someone was waiting with a trolley — no, a gurney: there were straps on it. He tried to fight, but they were both holding his arms now, pulling him across the floor.

If only he could stop panicking, if only he could think of what to *say*, but all he could do was roar with fury, kicking and struggling.

The woman by the trolley was wearing a tattered, shapeless green jumper. The detail of stitches and holes held his eyes, keeping them away from the spray hypo she clutched in one hand. 'No,' said Forrester. 'No drugs.'

They tipped the gurney until it was almost upright, and pushed him backwards against it. There was a strap that went around his ankles, and another that went over his throat. He stopped struggling when he felt the cold fabric across his neck.

Forrester pushed him up. The strap cut into his throat.

She unclipped the cuffs, threw them away. She and Cwej took an arm each and tied him down. They tilted the gurney back on its hinge until the Doctor was staring up at the ceiling, at their faces looking down at him.

'Why are you doing this?' he gasped.

Cwej looked as if he was about to burst into tears.

Forrester elbowed him out of the way and started pushing the gurney, fast. The others had to scurry to keep up with her.

He wanted to fight, but he was choking against the strap.

Anyway, you could never move or run in nightmares. 'Are you sure

we shouldn't sedate him?' said the green woman. She was naggingly familiar. Someone he'd once met? What random piece of his subconscious did she represent?

'We don't know which of your drugs are safe for him,'

said Forrester. 'Anyway, he's not going anywhere.'

He shouted as the gurney crashed through a pair of metal doors. He couldn't turn his head to get a proper look. It wasn't an operating theatre. Some sort of lab? A computer lab, much of the machinery as old and banged-up as the woman's jumper.

The gurney slid to a halt. Forrester booted its kickstand, locking it in place. Someone was waiting in the room.

'Bernice!' He almost sobbed with relief. 'Help me, Benny.'

She came up to the gurney. She took his hand. 'I'll stay with you. No matter what happens.'

'Why are you doing this?' he asked again. The green woman pushed cold metal against his skin, turned his head to get at his other temple. 'Have I done something terrible?'

he said to the opposite wall. He shook his head, but the electrodes wouldn't dislodge. 'Tell me what I've done!'

Benny's voice: 'I'll stay with you.' She squeezed his hand, fiercely.

The green woman: 'We're ready.'

Forrester: 'Get *on* with it!'

The sound of a machine warming up. An electric sensation in his temples.

The panic hit him again, and he wrenched against the straps and screamed.

He sat bolt upright in bed, yelling, catapulted back into wakefulness.

He flopped back down against the pillow, breathing hard, making himself relax, to wait for the nightmare feeling to drain away, for his breathing and heartsbeat to quieten.

It was just dawn. White curtains were moving in a soft cool breeze,

glowing with the early light. The ceiling seemed strangely far away, the window too high up.

On one of the bedroom's wooden walls, a clock ticked backwards, the numbers reversed around its face. He folded his arms behind his head, breathed out a sigh, and relaxed back onto the futon.

The beach house...

He hadn't been here for... decades, at least decades.

Decorated the place himself, which had meant dragging some of the centuries' accumulated junk out of the TARDIS

and scattering the knick-knacks about at random. If he wasn't mistaken, there was a half-read paperback of *Flaubert's Parrot* in the study. Maybe he'd finish reading it after breakfast, if he could find something else to prop up the desk's leg.

When he got downstairs, breakfast was ready. Two butter croissants were waiting for him on a tray in the kitchen, along with a mug of cocoa and a single boiled egg.

He extracted a clean paisley handkerchief from his pocket, tucked it under his chin. He pulled off a bit of croissant and dipped it in the cocoa. Then he allowed himself to think back over the dream.

Nasty. The usual themes — betrayal, captivity, revenge, all the usual self-flagellatory flotsam from the depths of his mind. Jung had called dreams a theatre '...in which the dreamer is himself the scene, the player, the prompter, the producer, the author, the public and the critic,' he said out loud, tapping absently at the top of the egg. There was a piece of toast beside it, neatly sliced in three. He dipped one slice into the egg, breaking the sticky yolk. It felt lonely to be having breakfast by himself, as though the whole universe had disappeared behind the Sunday newspaper.

There was a sudden flick of movement on one of the walls. He glanced around, but it-was gone. Probably a gecko; they got into the house all the time.

He'd bought the beach house when he was having the place at Allen Road painted. Everything there had been covered in dusty sheets, and the air was thick with chemical smells. So he'd flown to Sydney (with Mel in tow, if he remembered correctly) and driven a rented VW up the coast until they found the place, set back from the dunes in a

shorn patch of thick scrub. Isolated. Quiet, except for the constant growling of the sea.

Very quiet. Where was everyone else? The place had seven bedrooms. They were probably sleeping in. Lucky he hadn't woken them all up, shouting like that.

The book wasn't under the desk leg.

He went out onto the beach in his shirt sleeves, with a pair of dark glasses and some zinc cream. There was a haze of heat over the ocean. The water hissed and sucked at the shore. He walked along in the beery fizz of the surf for a while, watching the seagulls and looking for interesting shells, and finally had to admit that he couldn't remember how on earth he'd come to be here.

He stuck his hands in his pockets and jutted out his lower lip. Amnesiac episodes like this always disturbed him. Or at least he assumed they did. But with his lifestyle the odd swim in the Lethe was an occupational hazard.

He was probably recovering from something or other. He might have been asleep for days. His companions would probably be delighted to see him. He hadn't had a chance to say thank you for breakfast.

He spun around. A movement, out of the corner of his eye — no, it was just the gulls. Or an illusory sense of being watched. The nightmare feeling wouldn't go away.

He wanted someone to talk to.

Back at the house, the lights were on, but no-one was home. He snapped off the fluorescent tube in the guest bedroom, wandered from room to room. There was no sign of his companions.

In the kitchen, the breakfast things had been tidied away.

He puffed out his cheeks. There was intelligent life around somewhere, then.

He moped at himself in the bathroom mirror. Nothing ached, he couldn't see any obvious scars, signs of damage.

It was, of course, possible that he had deliberately locked his own memory away, for whatever reason. Anyway, an enemy was hardly going to throw him into the briar patch like this.

He sighed. Always enemies in the shadows. His holiday plans attracted them like magnets.

He looked back at the mirror. Something looked back out at him.

'That's a cheap trick,' he said.

The thing in the mirror didn't respond.

'Well?' he asked, reaching out a finger to touch the smooth glass.

Skin, said the thing in the mirror. *Flesh hate skin hate flesh you can't trust it gets sick it corrodes it ages and it dies when you least expect it*.

The Doctor watched as his palm slid down the mirror.

The glass was startlingly cold in the warm noon. He tried to pull his hand away.

Abruptly, he was smashing the mirror. *Nasty skin wicked skin hate skin hate flesh*. He smacked his hand against the glass until it splintered, shouted as the slivers bit into the thick skin of his palm.

He lost his balance, grabbing at the sink that held the mirror, but hitting it, hitting it. *Hate skin hate you hate you*.

Hate you.

When he woke up again it was evening. The wind hissed through the scrub. The purple sky was already breeding stars, glittering harshly in the cold, clean air.

Pieces of mirror were lying all over the floor, spattered with blood. He was lucky the cuts hadn't been worse. He rummaged in a drawer for bandages and things, bound his hand up, scowling.

The something in the mirror... he hadn't seen anything but his own reflection, but it had been *there*. And the feeling of being watched was back again. It was the rainforest feeling, knowing that tiny creatures were peeking at you from the trees.

But no-one had come to his rescue in the hours he'd spent in a daze on the bathroom floor. He was alone here.

Someone had laid the evening meal out on the kitchen table.

He stood in the doorway, eyeing it. Had breakfast been drugged?

Something in the food that suppressed memories?

Made him homicidal with regard to looking-glasses?

He circled warily around the food, pulling open drawers and peeping in cupboards. The old Chinese crockery still in its boxes, the chipped mugs purloined from the UNIT

cafeteria. Nothing was — out of its place. Alien. Except him.

He remembered his companions' faces from the dream.

Chris scared and trying to be professional, Roz stern and cold, Benny shattered and trying not to show it. He wished he could see them now. Talk to them.

Tomorrow he would go into town. Talk to someone. But now, he was suddenly, overwhelmingly tired, and his hand hurt. So he went to bed, and dreamed about Benny.

She was sitting in a chair. She had fallen asleep sitting up, shoulders hunched. She was wearing one of her more tattered denim jackets, over a T-shirt that said *Keep the Leap*. Her trousers were ex-army khaki, an Aboriginal flag patch sewn over one knee.

He was so pleased to see her that he just watched her sleep for a while. Her dark fringe hung down into her face.

There were fine lines around her eyes, and her skin was tanned from the sunlight of a hundred worlds.

He tried to imagine thirty years from now. She'd make a fabulous old lady, full of stories and laughter. Maybe with some grandchildren. He'd visit, teach them origami and stargazing.

'I'm getting sentimental in your old age,' he said aloud.

She startled awake, trying to pull herself together, be ready for action. But he wasn't struggling or yelling, just lying there, watching her. The air was still, only the machines disturbing the quiet, humming like insects. Out of a window, he could see a night sky.

In this version of the nightmare, there was no strap around his neck. He lifted his head, looked around the room.

It was a cybernetics lab, probably one dredged up from an ancient memory. Goodness knew he tried to edit his memories, keep the

clutter in his little brain attic down to a minimum, but there were always more. And besides, you never knew which snippet of information might be useful.

‘Twenty-third century,’ he said hoarsely. ‘Looks like a colonial set-up.’

‘Are you thirsty?’ said Benny. She was carefully checking a series of monitors. He was aware of the electrodes on his temples and behind his ears, the weight of their short antennae tugging as he moved his head.

He nodded, so she brought him a squeeze-bulb of water.

As nightmares went, this one was very calm and simple.

Tedious, even. A Hoothi would probably come in through the wall in a minute.

When she took the straw out of his mouth, he said, ‘Have you ever thought about having children?’ She almost dropped the water. ‘Sorry,’ he said.

She hovered. ‘Cinnabar says it would be a bad idea to talk to you.’

‘Cinnabar? The moth or the mineral?’ Benny didn’t answer.

Some authoritarian symbol or other, no doubt. ‘I’m sorry.

I just can’t motivate the action in this nightmare while I’m tied to this trolley.’

‘Everything’s going to be all right,’ she whispered, sitting back down in the chair.

‘Can’t you let me up? Even for a moment?’ He pulled against the bonds around his wrists. ‘I’m very uncomfortable.’

‘Are you in pain?’

‘No. I just want you to untie me. Please.’

‘Stop it,’ said Benny.

‘I’ll die here!’ He thrashed against the straps, shouting.

‘You’re killing me!’ It didn’t sound like his voice — panic wasn’t his style. But she was grabbing his head to stop him smacking it against

the trolley. She was crying; people were running in. ‘Don’t you understand? I’ll *die* here!’

The electrodes fizzed against his scalp. He convulsed as they tightened their cold grip on his brain. ‘Benny,’ he hissed through his clenched teeth. ‘Help me.’

‘Get her out of here,’ said someone, taking Benny by the arm.

‘No,’ she said. ‘I’ll stay with him.’

When he woke there was a lump in his throat, and he was still alone.

Breakfast was cold cereal and milk. He crunched on it despondently. ‘Company, that’s what you need,’ he told himself. ‘Before you start talking to yourself.’

He washed and dressed, buttoning a paisley waistcoat over his shirt. Judging by the haze over the ocean, it would be a warm day. He changed the bandage on his hand. The cuts were healing nicely.

He stopped at the upstairs bathroom. The floor was still covered in broken glass. So room service was limited to meals.

Gingerly, he picked up one of the larger pieces, an inch across. It glinted in the morning light, its surface lightly spattered with his blood. *Let me out hate you*, it said. He wrapped it in a handkerchief, put it in his pocket. It muttered to itself, irritably.

He rolled up his trouser legs and splashed through the surf again. The tide had left thick banks of seaweed to cook in the sunlight. He didn’t find any interesting shells. It should take less than an hour to walk into town.

After three hours he sat down on a rock.

A memory flashed into his mind: making this journey with Mel, to buy milk and ice creams. She’d striped her nose and cheeks with fluorescent-coloured zinc cream, given him a lecture about sunburn. The recollection was as clear as if it had been yesterday. Which, given his current state of mind, admittedly wasn’t saying much.

The horizon was remarkably clear, sun and sky sliced in two with a line that was almost geometric. The tide had come up the beach, soaking the ends of his trousers. It was hot.

Even the seagulls must be sleeping somewhere; the bright sky was empty of wheeling dots and hungry cries.

He had a sudden vision of Wells's time traveller, looking at a bloated sun across a steaming ocean, utterly alone at the end of the world. Could this bit of Australia have become an island since he'd last visited? Had he simply been walking around its circumference? Had hundreds of years passed?

Thousands? And if they had, why hadn't his house been swept away with the passing time?

Reluctantly, he took the piece of mirror out of his pocket and unwrapped it.

He dipped it into the water around the rock with his unbandaged hand, rubbing off the clinging blood with his hanky. The silver backing caught the sunlight in a blinding flash.

The piece of mirror looked up at him from the palm of his hand.

He sighed. 'Who are you?'

You sound like you don't want to know.

'Look,' said the Doctor. 'We have something in common.

You're trapped in that bit of glass. And I'm — I'm trapped on this island.' He squinted at the fragment. 'Did you bring me here? Trap me here?'

The thing in the mirror laughed. Tiny cracks spread across the glass with a tinkling sound.

The Doctor was about to toss it into the surf when he thought better of it. That could give someone a nasty cut. He wrapped it up again, pushed it back into his pocket. At least it was someone to talk to.

That evening, the piece of glass watched him from the table as he peered at one of the kitchen walls, nose an inch from the wood.

What are you doing?

'Looking for cracks,' said the Time Lord.

Oh yes?

‘Specifically,’ said the Doctor, ‘I want to see if the pattern of the wood has been determined by a fractal algorithm.’

The piece of mirror laughed. *You think this is a virtual reality!*

The Doctor glanced at it. ‘It’s on my list of possibilities.

Or, rather, *was* on my list.’

What makes you think this isn’t real?

‘Pieces of mirror,’ said the Doctor, ‘don’t generally talk to me. And then there’s the omelette.’ He waved at the half-eaten meal. ‘It tastes like cardboard. The Chardonnay’s like water. You sometimes get that effect in a simulation when the batteries are running down.’

What else, what else?

‘I thought I might be dreaming. But my nightmares aren’t like this. There’s too much sunshine, the surroundings are too familiar.’

What else?

‘Someone might have stranded me on an Earth-like planet. It wouldn’t take much effort to create the house from my memories. But the seagulls are a superfluous touch.’

What else?

‘I might have finally gone around the twist.’

What else?

‘Purgatory,’ said the Doctor shortly.

The mirror’s laughter was like light-bulbs underfoot.

Coming apart at the seams who’ll be trapped and who’ll be free?

‘You’re trapped here too.’ The Doctor leaned over the piece of glass, gripping the edge of the table. ‘You’re trapped too. Do you know a way out?’

When everything comes apart at the seams.

‘Is it this world that’s changing? Or my perception of it?’

You'll be trapped and who'll be free?

The Doctor thumped the table, infuriated. The wineglass tumbled off the table, shattered on the floor tiles. The sound was muffled, indistinct.

There was something watching him from outside the window.

He bolted to the sink, peered outwards into the gathering dusk. Nothing. He ran out of the door. Still nothing. 'Show yourself!' he shouted. 'Talk to me!'

He sat on the rock, watching the tide come in.

It wasn't computer-generated. He'd tried three different tricks to spot the programming. He'd wanted so much for it to be a VR. It couldn't be real — it *couldn't* be.

Unless, of course, he was coming apart at the seams.

His best guess right now was that he had been deliberately marooned here. Judging by the house, the menu, he very much suspected he had done it himself.

He might have been here for years. Decades. Centuries.

Long enough that the days blurred into one another, the little events of daily living lost their focus, until his memory was worn smooth as old stone.

There weren't many stars tonight. He stared at them, willing the sky to get darker, willing them to come out. Willing the surf to sound louder, the sand to regain its texture, its warmth. Even the feeling of being watched was gone.

But why? In the nightmare, he'd asked again and again,

'What have I done?' It might be a clue. He might be enduring some punishment. A life sentence. The dream suggested an arrest, a trial. But, if anyone had passed judgment, it would have been him.

What had most probably happened was that he'd gone mad. Not merely insane. *Mad*. Tumbled down into mental spaces a human being couldn't even imagine, turning corners only a Time Lord could turn.

Goodness knew what he might have done.

Leaving him alone in some quiet corner of the universe would have been the only safe thing to do. ‘Heaven left him at large to his own Dark Design,’ he whispered, ‘that with reiterated crimes he might heap on himself damnation.’

Absolutely nothing he did now would matter. It would take him a lot of years to die.

The grip started with his ankles.

Of course he tried to get up and run, but something had his feet, and shortly it had his legs as well.

‘No,’ he said, but the grip ran up his body, clutching muscles and skin. He felt it in his elbows and running through his hair, invisible fingers taking hold of his body, the way they had taken his hand and used him to break the mirror.

They went down to the surf together, the thing in the glass and the Time Lord. There were no stars, no horizon.

The water was invisible, just white noise licking at the beach.

‘You were right,’ said the Doctor. ‘It *is* coming apart at the seams.’ He hovered at the edge of the surf in the darkness, the water licking at his feet. ‘You’re unravelling it all, aren’t you?’

He heard that tinkling laughter again. The fingers were inside his skin, cold and sizzling, eroding him from the inside out.

He lunged for the water.

The grip inside him tightened, angrily, making him thrash in the hungry surf. The water dragged him away from the land, sucked him under.

‘For God’s sake, hold him down!’

The thing in the mirror screamed with rage as he tried to breathe ocean. His arms and legs jerked as it tried to force him back to the surface, back to the beach. But there was no beach. The water rolled on and on.

Someone was shining a brilliant light into his eyes. He flinched, squinted, tasted salt.

The static sound of the ocean hissed in his ears.

The light was overhead, on the ceiling. Something was holding his head down, pushing down on his arms, trying to stop the violent movement of his body.

The thing in the mirror roared with fury. He screamed with its rage, thrashed with its terror, and then, at last, it slid back into the water and was gone.

'Work!' he gasped hoarsely. 'Did it work?'

Benny relaxed her grip on his head. She looked over at Cinnabar, who nodded fiercely. 'All the scans are clear.'

He relaxed, exhausted. Chris and Roz let go of their death-grip on his arms. Benny pulled the straps away from him with almost feverish urgency. But he was too tired to do much more than roll onto his side, stretching cramped muscles. His hand stung. He looked at it. Deep white lines crisscrossed the palm.

'Are you all right?' said Roz, peering at him. 'Is that thing gone?'

'Yes,' he breathed. 'We'll talk in the morning.'

He blew out a long sigh and went to sleep.

2 ESP is Catching

The Doctor opened his eyes and shut them again, quickly.

Cinnabar and Byerley were having a quick kiss against a bench of medical equipment. He waited until he heard them part before he yawned and stretched.

'Good morning,' said Cinnabar Flynn.

'Don't you ever wear anything besides that jumper?' he asked.

She patted at the baggy green garment. 'It's my favourite. It's the only thing I brought from Earth. How do you feel?'

'I'm fine. Now.'

Byerley came over to the bed. 'Doctor.'

'Doctor.'

The man waved a print-out at him. ‘Your viral count has dropped to zero. I wanted to test you for antibodies too...’

‘You won’t be able to match my blood against the human samples. How many infections are we up to now?’

Cinnabar and Byerley exchanged glances. ‘Number forty-seven was reported this morning. That’s nearly ten per cent of the colonists.’

‘Then I don’t have time to be lying about here.’ He sat up, pushed the covers aside.

Sometime during the night, they’d moved him into the infirmary. Probably because the night shift in cybernetics couldn’t stand the snoring. There was an office area behind a desk, a door with a sign saying ‘The Other Room’ taped to it.

Sunlight was streaming in through a plastic window,

‘Breakfast,’ he said.

His companions were eating in the common area, a huge, circular room with a skylight at the very centre of the main habitat dome. They formed a haggard little triangle at the end of one of the long benches.

Two weeks ago, when they’d first come to Yemaya 4, this room was always full of people — eating, or making or mending things, or playing small instruments and singing.

Now there was hardly anyone here, just a family eating despondently in the corner and a group of kids throwing their modelling clay around while a tired-looking teacher watched.

His companions looked up as one, startled, like conspirators caught in the act. Bernice opened her mouth and closed it.

At last, Roz Forrester said, ‘Well?’

‘Yes, thanks.’ He beamed at them, saw Chris and Bernice relax as he sat down. But Roz was still peering at him, as if expecting the monster to surface again.

‘There’s no trace of the virus?’

‘It’s gone?’ said Benny. ‘Completely?’

The Doctor nodded. ‘There aren’t many micro-organisms which my immune system can’t deal with, given time.’

‘You’re not infectious, then,’ said Roz.

‘Hey!’ Benny glared at the Adjudicator across the table, but the Doctor drummed his fingers to get their attention.

‘What I am,’ he said, ‘is ravenous.’

Roz pushed her untouched plate across to him. Ration cubes and slices of tomatoes grown in Yemaya’s own soil.

He stabbed at the stuff with a plastic fork.

Chris said, ‘So what do we do now?’

‘There’s more going on here than I thought,’ said the Doctor, around a mouthful of cheese-flavoured rations. ‘Much more.’

Bernice leaned back in her chair, watching something the Playgroup were doing. ‘The virus had a completely different effect on you,’ she said.

‘Well, you are... I mean...’ Chris looked at Roz and stumbled; . that is, your biology is . .

‘ *Alien* is the word you’re looking for,’ said the Doctor. ‘It shouldn’t have affected me at all. But it did.’

Chris and Roz followed Bernice’s gaze. One of the kids, a girl in overalls, was backed up against the wall, trying not to cry. The teacher was getting food from the counter, her back to the group. The other children, in their temporary freedom, were lobbing chunks of clay at the girl.

‘Now, a virus designed to alter human genes can hardly do anything to me,’ the Doctor continued, oblivious. ‘But memory sequences, that’s another thing. My metabolism is capable of interpreting human memory RNA, producing the Gallifreyan equivalent.’

He noticed that none of them were listening to him. Saw the bits of clay arcing towards the girl, jerking back, as if they were bouncing off an invisible shield a foot from her body.

‘That’s forty-eight,’ he said softly.

‘Odds are,’ said Roz, ‘one of us is going to be infected.’

‘One of us already has been,’ muttered Chris. The tall blonde’s boots sank into the grass as he followed her.

‘I meant the *humans*,’ said Roz sourly. ‘You, me or Benny might suddenly become telepathic. Or psychokinetic.’

The colonists digging and planting looked up as they passed. Chris found himself nervous under their eyes. He could imagine what Roz was thinking. Here, like everywhere else, they were the aliens.

Yemaya 4 was ideal for colonization — a large temperate zone, gentle seasons, biochemistry not too different from Earth’s. Thick forests, rushing rivers, no large predators. The gravity was slightly lower, which leant a spring to Chris’s step as he hurried after the short black woman. From here, the cluster of domes were distant bumps, the big silver habitat dome surrounded by storage sheds.

The colonists had been here for two months. They had started accelerated gardens around the habitat dome almost immediately, and now they were busily turning some of the surrounding meadows into farms. The Doctor said that their ecological plan was exceptionally good — they were going to be able to use several Yemayan native plants as crops, and planetfall had been timed to allow almost immediate planting of Terran seed stock. Until one or the other crop came up, they’d be living on a combination of rations and veggies from the garden. It would be more than a year before they could think about unfreezing the animals.

The whole colonization had been proceeding like clockwork when the first infections occurred. Someone’s kid had fallen in the fast-running river nearby, and, when the mother couldn’t reach the boy with a tree limb, she’d pulled him out with her mind.

The next day, her husband told Doctor St John he thought he was going insane. Hearing voices. Byerley had checked him with a standard telepathic potential test, and the results had been off the scale.

It had taken Byerley a week to isolate an unknown virus from their blood. In that time, there were a dozen more cases. The day after that, the TARDIS had plonked down in a field next to the habitat dome, and the Doctor had poked his nose right in.

It had been the Time Lord who had isolated human genes from the

virus. The bug was travelling to the brain and releasing its payload: psychic powers. There was even a pyrokinetic and a couple of psychometrists. There didn't seem to be a pattern to who got what.

Chris caught Roz up. 'Would it be so bad if one of us *did* get some kind of power? It could be useful. Imagine smashing a Dalek up inside its shell by thinking about it.'

'Imagine smashing up someone's brain inside their skull by thinking about it.' Roz stopped still and looked out across the field, where Cinnabar's green jumper was visible against the fluorescent bulk of a hovertractor. 'Why do you think the Gifted were registered back home, Chris?'

'I thought it was because they needed training to use their powers safely.' Chris found himself trailing behind her again as she cut across the field. 'What do they do with them in this century?'

'Nothing at all, apparently. They just let them run loose.'

'Hey there, hi there, ho there,' said Cinnabar, wiping sweat from her forehead with a grimy hand. 'Either of you any good at fixing tractors?'

Chris shrugged. The hovertractor was stuck in the ground at an angle, looking as if it had swerved and crashed.

'What happened to it?'

' *I* did, I'm afraid.' A skinny black kid came from around the back of the tractor. 'I was... well, I was...'

'He tried to drive it psychokinetically,' said Cinnabar. 'It's all right, Cephas, you just made a mistake, that's all.'

The boy withered under Roz's glare. 'I was just trying to get the hang of it,' he said. 'If I'm going to be stuck like this for the rest of my life..

'You're not,' snapped Roz. 'Plan on being cured. Shortly.'

The boy's mouth drew into a line. 'It's okay for you. You can leave any time...'

'What can I do for you folks?' said Cinnabar, half disappearing into the tractor's engine.

'Oh, we've been sent to get more soil bacteria samples,'

sighed Chris. ‘The Doctor wants some bugs from the tilled areas, in case anything got dug up. Hey,’ he added, ‘that’s new, isn’t it?’ Cinnabar stuck her head out and looked where he was pointing across the field. A small dome had been set up, almost a kilometre from the habitat dome.

‘That’s the Smith-Smiths,’ murmured Cinnabar. ‘Haven’t you seen them, going around with their masks on?’

‘The filter masks?’ said Roz. ‘I thought they must be working with chemicals.’

‘Nope. They’re trying not to let themselves get infected.

They stay in their own dome most of the time. The kids never come out.’

‘Paranoia.’

‘It’s something religious, I think. I don’t know them too well. Given we still don’t know the source of the infections, maybe they’ve got the right idea.’

Cephas said, ‘No. If we’re going to sort this out, we’re going to have to do it together.’ He turned big eyes on Chris and Roz. ‘My sister said they might make us leave the colony. Before we could infect anyone else.’

‘That’s not going to happen,’ said Chris.

‘It might make sense,’ said Roz. ‘Slow the rate of new infections.’

‘Possibly,’ said Cinnabar. ‘But for all we know the bug’s in the soil or the air. Cephas is right. We’re not going to solve this by splitting up. Pass me the bluminator, will you?’

The boy knelt by the tool kit. His hand hovered over the device. Then he flicked it up into the air, watching it hover in front of his face. It shook in his invisible grip.

He let it drift up, past Roz’s scowl, into Cinnabar’s outstretched hand. She grinned.

Bernice came with him when he took the girl to the infirmary.

‘Psychokinesis,’ said the Doctor, as he lifted the sobbing child onto a bench.

Doctor Byerley St John abandoned the genetic sequence he was working on and strode across to them. He sat down on the bench beside the little girl, and took her hand. 'You'll be all right, sweetheart,' he said. 'Lots of people have caught the same germ you have, but it doesn't hurt. You won't even feel sick.'

Next to the crying six-year-old, Byerley was huge. He was muscular, with the frame of a dancer rather than a bodybuilder, with serious eyes and dark hair.

'I want my daddy,' she sobbed. 'Are you going to send me away?'

'No-one's going to send you anywhere, honey.'

'But my teacher said that all the people with the germ will have to go and live somewhere else.'

'Not if I have anything to say about it. I'm going to call your daddy, and then I'm going to prick your finger to take a drop of blood, okay? Then you can have a jelly bean.' She nodded, sniffling. There was clay in her hair, sticking it to her forehead. Byerley got up to get his equipment.

The Doctor was stalking about the lab, peering at machines and reports. Benny patted the girl on the head, awkwardly. 'When I was your age,' she said, 'I used to wish I had magical powers all the time. I used to wish I could fly, so that instead of getting into fights, I would just fly away.' The girl just shook her head. 'Look, Doctor, if you've got any new insights...'

'It can't be Yemayan,' said the Doctor, pacing. 'And if...

but then, the colonists' gene pool was deliberately diverse.

It's not...' He trailed off into an inaudible mumble as Byerley came back into the room, putting down his equipment on the bench.

'Your daddy will be here in a couple of minutes. Okay?'

The girl nodded again. 'Then I'll take this sample, and you can go home. Doctor, will you come with me?'

The Time Lord, still muttering to himself, followed Byerley into the storeroom. Byerley waved a hand in front of his face.

'Doctor.'

‘Doctor.’

‘Have you been able to draw any conclusions from your own infection?’

The Doctor leaned on a shelf, folding his arms. ‘There’s obviously a second payload in the virus. Not just DNA, but memory RNA. But whose RNA? Where did it come from in the first place?’

‘I still think it’s something native. It has to be. What are the odds of the virus’s protein coat matching that of Yemayan soil viruses?’

‘No, no. We’ve been over this. The protein’s Yemayan, the genes are Terran. Could it be a natural hybrid?’

‘Then how did it overcome our inoculation programme? It has to be manufactured.’

‘Not necessarily. There are some naturally occurring microorganisms which can affect psi ability.’

‘I wish more was known about the genetics,’ said Byerley. ‘Back on Earth, the only research is being done by big business, and that’s all kept under wraps. Listen, no-one else had symptoms like yours. I still don’t quite understand what that was all about.’

‘My own memories and personality were being overwritten by the viral memory RNA,’ said the Doctor.

‘You were being taken over?’

‘Not exactly. You couldn’t store an entire personality inside a virus. But the viral RNA was replicating itself out of control, probably as a result of my brain cells trying to make sense out of it, integrate it. If Cinnabar hadn’t plugged me into her computer, given me a chance to find the viral sequences and eliminate them, it would have driven me mad and then killed me.’

Byerley nodded gravely. ‘You should be immune now, at least.’

‘I should have been immune in the first place.’ The Doctor squinted, as though trying to see something in the distance. ‘Just as the inoculated colonists should have been.

After all the work we’ve done, all the research, I should have an idea of what’s going on here. I feel as if it’s on the tip of my mind...’ He

shook his head. ‘My brain cells are probably still shaken up. It’ll come to me.’

‘Doctor,’ said Byerley, ‘if it does come to you, do you think we’re going to be able to cure it?’

The Doctor looked back through the door, where Bernice was trying to comfort the girl and her dismayed father. ‘Some people would consider these powers a miracle. They’d think we were looking a gift horse in the mouth.’

‘Most of these people are just plain terrified. They don’t even want to know what’s going on — they just want an easy solution. But it’s more complicated than we think, isn’t it?’

The Doctor nodded. ‘And we can’t do anything about virus or powers until we find out what’s really going on.’

‘You smell something burning?’ asked Chris.

Roz sniffed the air and shook her head. She was leaning on the tree he was sitting against, watching a gaggle of kids improvising a game with a saggy football. The trees here looked like gigantic celery stalks, dark green at the base and shading upwards to fiery orange at the top. Tiny, harmless creatures crawled over the succulent bark.

‘Look,’ said Chris. ‘They’ve worked it into the game.’ He pointed. ‘The tall girl with the black hair, she’s telepathic. She has to guess where the other person will throw the ball next.’

Roz saw the girl lunge sideways suddenly, snatching the ball out of the air. ‘And the red-headed twins are both psychokinetic. They’ve been throwing the ball around without their hands.’

‘They do seem to have pretty good control, for learners,’

said Roz. ‘So long as they don’t start throwing one another around.’

Chris shrugged. ‘It all looks pretty harmless to me.’

‘Don’t let your guard down,’ she told him. ‘You know how fast things can get out of control.’

‘So, urn... if one of us *does* become infected,’ said Chris,

‘what do we do about it?’

‘The Doctor will find a cure for the psi powers,’ said Roz.

‘What you really want to know is, what do we do if one of us is... possessed, the way that he was?’

Chris wished he could tell what she was thinking. ‘Maybe it only does that to aliens.’

‘Look,’ Roz said, ‘we just don’t know enough, all right?

We don’t know where the virus came from or what it’s for, and, until the Doctor finds that out, we can’t make any assumptions. All we can do is wait.’

Abruptly, she turned and smacked an armoured fist into the tree trunk, showering him with splinters.

‘Sorry,’ she said, as he flapped his fingers in his hair, looking startled. ‘I hate monsters that are too small to shoot.’

Benny found the Doctor in Byerley’s microbiology lab, sleeves rolled up, arms sheathed in long latex gloves. She sat down on a stool across the room, waited until he finished streaking the bacterial samples he was working on.

‘How’s it going?’

‘Our current theory,’ said the Doctor, snapping off the gloves, ‘is that the virus is symbiotic with the soil bacteria. It’s nonsense, unfortunately. I’m fine.’

Benny laughed. ‘You are, aren’t you?’

‘I am now. Thanks for watching over me.’ The Doctor washed his hands, rolled his sleeves back up. ‘Come on, let’s go and steal some of Byerley’s coffee.’

They lounged about in the colony doctor’s office, drinking the medic’s special blend, smuggled from Earth in his luggage. ‘Can I ask you something?’ said Bernice.

The Doctor nodded.

‘Why did you ask me about having children?’

‘Did I?’ He closed his eyes, trying to bring the moment back. ‘I really have no idea.’

‘Well, I’m not planning on it.’

The Doctor nodded, looking uncomfortable. ‘It would be difficult.’

Benny put down her cup. ‘I thought about it. After you asked. I realized I had no idea how I felt. But then we brought that little girl here this morning. And I suddenly knew I wasn’t going to have any kids.’

‘Oh,’ said the Doctor. ‘You mean, not while you’re travelling with me?’

She shook her head. ‘The poor thing could be turned into a fungus one week, taken over by aliens the next... I couldn’t stand it.’

‘It’s bad enough,’ said the Doctor gravely, ‘having to watch it happen to your friends.’

Benny hugged him suddenly, almost making him spill the coffee. ‘Gack,’ he said.

He put down the cup carefully, put his hands on her shoulders. ‘If you’re serious about this,’ he said, ‘we can drop you off somewhere.’

‘Maternity leave?’ She shook her head. ‘Something else I realized. I’m not ready to lose you yet.’

They pushed their foreheads together. ‘I just wish there was something more I could do here,’ whispered Benny.

‘We’ve been to so many worlds. But this world is so new, so fragile. Like a new child. Can’t we help them?’

‘We will,’ said the Doctor softly, ruffling her hair. ‘And I know something you could do.’

Later. He stood alone in Cinnabar’s cybernetics lab. He picked up the end of the gurney’s neck-strap, rolled the fabric between his fingers contemplatively.

He hadn’t worried about the needlestick at all. It had been careless of him — not concentrating on one thing at once, that was always his problem in laboratories. But there shouldn’t have been anything in human blood that could affect him.

The memories had started surfacing a few hours later.

Just flashes, tiny moments. Someone else’s memories.

Infuriatingly, he couldn't remember any of them now. But he remembered how they'd kept repeating over and over, like a melody he couldn't get out of his mind.

Roz had been the first person he had told. He knew that she'd do whatever was necessary, without hesitating.

Byerley had taken it all in his stride — both the fact that there were viral particles in the Doctor's blood, and that his new patient just *looked* human. In this time period, 'alien' still meant scaly and green. But, when the Time Lord had asked Byerley to keep it to himself, he'd looked at him long and hard and then agreed.

It had grown steadily worse. He would be so caught up in the foreign memories that he forgot where he was for minutes at a time. That was when he and Forrester had talked about the gurney.

The idea had been to create a 'reality' that could keep the viral personality busy, while the Doctor ferreted out its memories and erased them, the same way he edited his own memories from time to time. Of course, the 'reality' would have to keep the Doctor's conscious mind just as busy... a cyberspace wouldn't do it, he'd have realized what it was too quickly.

The memories had swollen, taking up more of his mind, making it impossible to concentrate from minute to minute.

When he'd disappeared, Chris and Roz had gone to bring him back. They'd found him in the forest, talking nonsense.

The beach house had been a pocket of his own mind, monitored and stabilized by Cinnabar's computer link. She and Byerley had also been monitoring the levels of virus in his blood, the changes to the memory RNA in his brain.

He'd given up so easily, so quickly, accepting that he'd gone mad. Perhaps, on a subconscious level, he'd been waiting for that to happen for a long time.

The question now was: whose memories had they been?

For that matter, why had they been packaged into the viruses? Why hadn't they emerged in the minds of the infected humans? Why the psi powers in any case? Why... ?

He let go of the strap, sat on the trolley, folding his arms.

He was so close to the solution. So close. He hoped he hadn't erased it along with the foreign personality. He needed the answer, before the colony's tensions became worse. No-one had been hurt yet; they were scared, confused, but they hadn't started to turn on one another.

If there was violence, it wouldn't last long. There just weren't that many of them. And now, some of them would be able to kill you by thinking about it.

Chris wandered in. 'We've got you that dirt.' He stopped, seeing that he'd caught the Time Lord in the middle of a train of thought.

'If we don't help these people soon,' said the Time Lord in a low voice, 'there's the very real possibility that we're going to find ourselves in the middle of a miniature civil war.

We've got to find a cure.' He banged himself in the forehead.

'If I could just work out where the infection had come from in the *first* place!'

'Inoculations,' said Chris.

The Doctor looked up at him.

Chris coloured. 'They were all vaccinated before they came here, weren't they?'

'Great jumping gobstoppers!' The Doctor hopped down off the gurney. 'Why didn't I think of that?'

3 Looking for Things

'Byerley!' said the Doctor, almost running into the lab.

'We've been coming at this from completely the wrong angle!'

The medic was filling a cup from his coffee machine. He spun around so fast that he sent a spoonful of sugar flying.

'Listen,' said the Doctor. 'We've been assuming that the virus causes the psi powers.'

'Well, everyone who's been infected has developed powers...'

‘No. It’s the other way around.’ The Doctor waved his hands about, agitatedly. ‘We’ve tested everyone who developed powers. But we haven’t tested everyone else.

What if the virus only affects certain people?’

‘I do have two asymptomatic cases on record,’ said Byerley. He sat down, almost involuntarily, behind his desk.

‘Do you mean that...?’

The Doctor perched on a corner of the desk. ‘Everyone’s infected. We assumed that the virus was carrying the genes for the psi powers. But what if those genes are already present in some brains?’

Byerley leaned across the desk. ‘The viral code is switching on the latent genes in those individuals,’ he said.

‘The same way some cancer viruses switch on growth genes.’

‘And it would explain why different people have developed different powers, rather than everyone getting the same power.’

‘It’s too specific,’ breathed Byerley. ‘Something that specific couldn’t possibly be natural. But I thought, if it were manufactured, there’d be a serial number in the chromosomes...’

‘The standard procedure for this century is for a full biological survey to be done before anyone sets foot on the planet, correct?’

Byerley nodded. ‘Robots take samples of bacteria and viruses. Anything that might be pathological is used to develop a vaccine and — oh my God, that’s what you mean, isn’t it! There was something in the inoculations themselves!

Oh my God, the bastards — they’ve been using us as guinea pigs!’

The Doctor put a hand on Byerley’s arm before he spilt his coffee. ‘Not necessarily. Who was responsible for the vaccinations?’

‘DKC,’ said Byerley. ‘The Dione-Kisumu Company. They provided most of the medical technology.’ He gestured around the lab with his cup, angrily.

‘I’ve heard of them,’ said the Doctor.

‘We came here in a DKC colony ship. You’ve met Captain Kamotja,

haven't you? She flew the thing. The crew took it back, and she stayed on to oversee the initial stages.'

The Doctor nodded. 'The Company made quite a profit during this century's push for colonization.'

'Doctor,' said Byerley, 'I need to ask you about that.'

'About Dione-Kisumu? They were Kenyan, weren't they?'

'No. About you — and Benny and Chris and Forrester.

About why you're here.'

'All right.' The Doctor folded his arms. 'We knew from future history that an outbreak of psi powers occurred on Yemaya 4 in the year 2257. But there was very little information about it. As though someone deliberately covered up the records. I wanted to see for myself what happened here.'

'Believing that you're not human is much easier than believing that you come from the future. How — how far in the future?'

'We travel,' said the Doctor, 'a lot.'

'Why us?' said Byerley. 'Why this colony? Yemaya doesn't have any strategic significance. The geological survey was completely run-of-the-mill.' He shook his head.

'Why is all this happening to us?' He pointed at the Doctor.

'You must know.'

'You may have just been in the wrong place at the wrong... Time moves in mysterious ways.'

'What the hell are they trying to do?' Byerley let him go, sat down behind his desk, despondent. 'We came here to get away from all of that sort of thing. From the companies and corporations. Do you know where I was working before I came here?'

The Doctor shook his head. 'Sydney,' said Byerley.

'Downstream from the nuclear plant. There are kids there living in a rubbish tip.' He raised his hands, as if to shield himself from the memory. 'There was a little boy that the others kept blindfolded. He made weapons for them, by touch.'

‘I didn’t think anyone still lived in Sydney,’ said the Doctor softly. Not in this epoch.’

‘When I — when I took the blindfold off, his eyes were like a pair of loose grey eggs. They rolled and pulsed as though someone was inside his head, trying to push their fingers out... and I just walked away. Just gave him his antibiotic shot and walked out of there.’ He reached out blindly for his coffee, knocked the cup over. ‘I can’t get away from it,’ he whispered. ‘Even here...’

The Doctor picked up the cup. The cold liquid formed a neat pool on Byerley’s desk, surface tension holding it in place. ‘No,’ he said. ‘You can’t. You can only do the same thing you were doing in Sydney.’

Byerley looked at him.

‘You can fight back,’ said the Doctor.

‘Fight?’ said Byerley. ‘I’ll *kill* those bastards. Wait till I get on the communications link. The Colonial Commission...’

‘No,’ said the Doctor sharply. Not yet. We don’t want them to know that we know. In fact, we should keep this between the two of us for as long as we can.’

The sun was going down when they reached the waterfall.

Benny’s mind had been in neutral for an hour, empty of everything except the wind through the trees and the distant hissing of the water.

Zaniwe and Jenny had made the trip twice before, leaving beacons behind in the forest. They navigated partly by memory, partly by tracking the beacons, short poles with a red bulb of radio equipment on top. They looked like matchsticks poking out of the undergrowth.

There was a wide clearing at the waterfall’s base. The air was cool, a fine spray of droplets forming a mist around the rocky pool at the bottom of the cliff. They pulled off their backpacks, dropped them on the ground. Benny lay flat on her back and made a face. ‘Argh,’ she said. ‘I don’t suppose I could get you two to carry me the rest of the way.’

Zaniwe laughed, as Jenny rummaged in her backpack.

‘Really, it’s only another hour,’ she said. ‘It’s a very nice walk in the morning light.’

Benny shut her eyes, listened to the roar of the water, feeling its distant rhythm through the soil beneath her.

They'd set out from the domes in the morning. There had been four more infections reported during the night. But the Doctor had had a glint in his eye, which meant he was onto the solution. He hoped to have confirmed the source of the bug by the time they got back. Maybe even to have found a cure.

In the meantime, he'd suggested she investigate the local ruins. Jenny was the colony's xenobiologist; they would have made it to the waterfall more quickly, if she hadn't insisted on rushing off into the trees every half-hour to take photos of the wildlife.

Benny couldn't even *see* the wildlife, but Jenny would point excitedly to some tiny creature half hidden in a tree while snapping a dozen holograms of it. The biggest creature they'd seen since entering the forest was the size of a cat, a slender-necked, dappled thing grazing on the undergrowth. It had blinked its single eye at them and bolted before she could take its picture.

The couple were pulling bedding and equipment out of their packs. They never seemed to do anything if it wasn't together. They were Africans, like most of the colonists —

people who could afford to break away from Earth and look for a new life. Originally they were from whatever country South Africa was part of these days, the United African Confederacy or something or other.

They'd been flying a hoverskimmer over the forest on a survey run when they'd discovered the temple. Benny dragged her backpack over and pulled out the sheaf of photos. They were slightly distorted without the hologram viewer, but they were still striking — the forest like an ocean of trees, different shades of green and yellow. And the clearing in the centre, the ruins stark silvery grey against the green of the undergrowth.

They were clearer in the later photos, Jenny holding the skimmer in place while Zaniwe hung out of the window, snapping away. At first glance, they could be mistaken for recent dwellings; Jenny said she'd nearly crashed the skimmer when she saw them. But the closer shots showed weather-worn stone, huts open to the sky, thick growth around and on the buildings.

Benny rolled over, holding the best picture in a stray beam of late-

afternoon sunlight. The central building dwarfed the others. It reminded her of a Mayan temple, a steep ziggurat with a flat top. The other buildings were clustered around it at a respectful distance.

It was a shame they couldn't have flown the skimmer here, but there simply wasn't anywhere to land it. The trees came right up to the edge of the huts and stopped there, as if they were just as timid as the little buildings about getting close to the temple.

If it *was* a temple. Benny knew only too well how dangerous it was to play guessing-games about alien cultures. Make no assumptions, that was the rule; avoid the just-like' fallacy.

But in this case the only danger was of being roasted in the archaeological journals. These aliens were long, long gone.

Benny wasn't sure whether the Doctor had sent her out here because he wanted her safely out of the way, because he thought she was feeling bored and useless, or because he thought the ruins might actually have something to do with what was happening to the colonists. From what he'd been saying this morning about the inoculation programme, that didn't seem likely.

Zaniwe and Jenny had got their tent together already.

Benny scrambled up, knocking twigs and dirt off her denim gear.

'So what did you find on the last couple of tries?' she asked, dragging stuff out of her pack.

'Very little,' said Jenny. 'We do not have the equipment to date the buildings, but they may have been there more than a thousand years. We didn't want to damage the site by digging. If there are tools or potsherds or other artifacts, a proper archaeologist should search for them.'

'And that's you,' said Zaniwe, dumping an armload of firewood in the centre of the camp.

'The initial planetary surveys didn't find anything, did they?'

Zaniwe shook her head. 'Nope. Unless someone was fudging — there's no way they'd allow colonists on the planet if there was evidence of an alien civilization. Even just remains.' 'You mean someone might have found the temple, but kept it quiet so the colonization could proceed?' 'This happened on Nephelokokkugian two years ago,' said

Jenny.

‘There was a furore.’

Benny had become completely tangled up in her tent.

She threw the half-folded thing down on the ground in disgust. ‘Any inscriptions?’

‘Not much,’ said Zaniwe. ‘A few symbols on the temple, or they might just be illustrations. I’m surprised Professor Smith-Smith even let us come out here again. She thinks this is all a waste of time.’

Benny aimed a kick at her tent. ‘I wonder what they were like…’

Couldn’t get the canopy open.

‘Are you ill?’

Chris looked at Roz in surprise. ‘No, no, I’m fine!’

The small, hot sun was just starting to disappear into the trees. They were walking through a field, along a track in the grass made by passing machinery. Their boots squelched in the damp soil.

‘You’re very quiet.’

‘I was just thinking. That’s all.’

‘What about?’

‘Stuff,’ he said. ‘It occurred to me that if you had a gene for psi powers, you’d probably know about it.’

The sun was behind him, making her squint up at him.

‘What?’

‘Wouldn’t your family pedi… um, history mention something like that?’

‘It doesn’t,’ she said shortly. ‘But think about it. These genes are recessive, and rare. Like one-in-a-million rare.

They could be passed down through a family for generations before they showed up in someone.’

‘They can’t be all that rare. The Doctor says that the proportion of affected colonists is levelling out around fourteen per cent.’

‘Makes you wonder about how they selected them, doesn’t it?’ Roz shrugged. ‘I don’t know a damned thing about abnormal genetics.’

‘I don’t know if that’s the right word,’ mumbled Chris, and suddenly he had drawn his blaster and was pointing it at a bush. ‘Come out of there!’ he yelled.

Roz was half a second behind him (*Damn, that was fast!*), in time to train her weapon on the tiny creature who emerged from the foliage. Terrified eyes above a hideous black snout. She shivered when she realized it was a little girl. Even she could have burned the kid from this distance.

They lowered their weapons. The child hovered for a moment, then bolted, running up the path towards a small silver dome.

‘She can lose the filter mask,’ said Chris, looking shaken.

‘Don’t these people read their e-mail?’

‘Let’s see if we can convince Mummy and Daddy.’ Roz strode up the path after the girl.

There was a forcefield around the dome, marked with small flashes of light at eye level at two-metre intervals. They looked like tiny candle flames circling the house, warding off evil spirits.

Roz found a comm screen outside the forcefield. She tapped at its call button for a couple of minutes.

‘There’s no sign of the kid,’ said Chris, who’d jogged around the house.

‘Nobody home,’ said Roz, giving the comm screen a final thump. ‘They’ve made a run for it.’

‘No,’ said Chris, ‘they’re here...’ He squinted at the house, as though in intense concentration.

‘Are you trying to have an idea?’ said Roz dryly.

‘We just need to get their attention.’ Cwej drew his blaster again, and pumped a single shot into the forcefield.

It absorbed the shot, sent its energy spinning around the field as flashes of blue and violet light. He waited for the blast to dissipate, and was raising his gun for a second shot when the comm screen bleeped.

'What? What?' shouted a man, his face distorted by the flat surface of the screen. He was very blond. A filter mask hung around his neck.

'Mr Smith-Smith?' said Roz.

'Don't try to breach the forcefield,' he said. 'I'm willing to defend my home with deadly force.'

Roz rolled her eyes at Chris. 'Mr Smith-Smith, have you received the message from Doctor St John?'

'Yes, of course.'

'Then why is your daughter wearing an air-filter mask?'

'There's nothing the matter with taking additional precautions,' said Mr Smith-Smith.

'I understand you have religious concerns,' said Roz.

'But the masks and the forcefield aren't going to help you.

You ought to come back to the habitat dome for tests.'

'"Religious concerns?"' said Smith-Smith. 'We're pretty tired of people making us out to be weirdos.'

'Mr Smith-Smith,' said Roz, with infinite patience, 'your Personal beliefs are none of my business. I've been asked to Come here to make sure you understand the *medical* facts of the situation. You obviously do. Now it's up to you.'

She snapped off the comm screen. 'Weirdo,' she muttered.

Chris was staring off into the forest. She tugged on his arm until he looked down at her. 'Let's leave them to it,' she said. 'They're the last ones who haven't been tested.'

Chris said, 'Except us.'

'We don't need to be tested,' said Roz. 'No inoculations, remember?'

‘Oh, come on, it’s just a little pinprick.’ He held up a finger in front of her face. ‘Right here. You’ll hardly feel it.’

‘Chris, what’re you talking about?’

He shrugged. ‘I just thought... well, there’s no sense in taking chances...’

Sometimes you’re such an idiot, she thought irritably. He turned away, his brow wrinkling. She punched him on the arm.

‘We’ll see what the Doctor says. Come on.’

‘The Doctor says,’ said the Doctor, ‘that he’s busy right now, and you ought to let Cinnabar take you home and feed you.’

The Doctor and Byerley had been muttering and clattering in the small lab for hours. Now it was getting crowded. Cinnabar had turned up, her shift in cybernetics complete. And Cwej and Forrester always took up a lot of room when they were wearing their armour. Chris had folded his arms tightly, as though worried that he would be asked to buy anything he broke.

‘Begone,’ said the Doctor. ‘This is going to take hours.’

‘What is it you’re doing?’ Roz insisted, as Byerley clattered past with an incubator tray full of blood samples.

‘We’re sequencing ten different strains of the virus.’

‘Sequencing?’ said Cinnabar.

Byerley said, ‘Working out the sequence of base pairs in the DNA. Decoding the genes.’

‘You’re decompiling it?’

‘Yes,’ said the Doctor. ‘Or we would be if it weren’t for all these sightseers. Scat.’

‘Once we have the sequence, we can work out what each of the genes is supposed to do,’ said Byerley. ‘There’s a lot more to this bug than just the powers.’

‘Crackers sometimes hide their names in the code of their computer viruses,’ said Cinnabar. Will the sequence give you some idea of where the virus came from?’

‘Very probably,’ said the Doctor. ‘ *Exeunt*.’

Cinnabar sighed. ‘Ration cubes?’ she asked the Adjudicators.

Byerley and Cinnabar lived in a single room at the edge of the habitat dome. Chris had to fold himself up to get under the door lintel, and sit on the single piece of furniture that doubled as bed and lounger. He tugged at the catches on his armour, awkwardly, yawning. Roz leaned back against the wall, shutting her eyes, pretending to be comfortable, even when he kept banging her breastplate with his elbow.

‘We’re both hopeless in the kitchen.’ Cinnabar grinned.

‘Such as it is. I think we’re lucky to be stuck with ration cubes, for a while at least.’ She started heating up some of the ubiquitous slabs of processed food. ‘Though we’re not going to lure anyone else to Yemaya on a diet like this.’

‘I’m surprised there are so few of you to start with,’ said Roz.

Cinnabar sat cross-legged on the floor, next to the low stove unit. ‘We’re the pioneers, the ground-breakers. Well, really, we’re a sort of test.’ She tugged absently on a loose thread in her jumper. ‘The idea is that a few hundred highly skilled people and their families are planted here. If we make a success of the place, if we manage to raise a crop and we don’t get eaten by alien monsters, then more colonists are sent.’

‘What happens if it goes wrong?’ said Chris.

‘We get taken home again. Unless they decide for a second try, but that doesn’t often happen. They’ll just strip-mine the place and then use it as a prison colony.’ The stove pinged, and she pulled the cubes out. Earthlike planets are a dime a dozen. And too many colonies have been wiped out.

Better to risk a relatively small group at first.’

She handed Roz a cube and a utensil. Chris took his plate awkwardly, still trying to struggle out of his breastplate.

The Older woman said, ‘What will you and Byerley do?’

‘I don’t know.’ Cinnabar put her plate down, suddenly. I just don’t have any idea.’ She pushed her face into her hands. ‘I don’t think anyone knows.’

Benny blinked awake and wriggled her hand out through the tent opening. It wasn't just raining, it was pelting down.

She rolled over, and *sloshed*.

'Holy tents, Batman!' There was an inch of water in the tent. She pulled her torch out from inside the sleeping-bag and shone it around. Yep, there it was — a long rip in the side of the tent, probably created by her desperate fumbling with it earlier in the day.

She wriggled out of the narrow plastic tube, the torch beam swinging around in the blackness. Zaniwe was sticking her head out of the other tent. 'What's up?'

'My tent's awash!' Benny shone the torch on the rip.

'You'd better grab your stuff and come in here then!'

shouted the black woman over the rain.

'You're sure that's okay?'

'Of course! Get in here before you drown!'

Benny knelt on the wet rocks in front of her tent, rummaging inside. Most of her stuff was safely tucked away in the backpack. She threw in her boots and a soggy *National Geographic*, zipped the bag up, and dived for cover.

It was a tight squeeze, even though Zaniwe's and Jenny's tent was much larger than Benny's. Several moments of giggling, wriggling and fumbling with a lantern followed. Finally Jenny got the light to work, and Benny discovered she was wedged upside down between them on top of their sleeping-bag.

'This is a little intense.' Zaniwe groaned. 'Sorry, folks,'

said Benny, wriggling.

'We have been awake for some time in any case,' said Jenny, sitting up on one elbow. 'Talking about Cinnabar and Byerley.'

Benny unzipped her pack, got out her big coat and started tugging it on. 'Oh yes?'

'About their wedding, actually,' said Zaniwe. 'Did they tell you about it? Just before you turned up.'

Benny shook her head. ‘Cinnabar mentioned they’d had to stop the ceremony partway through.’

‘Yep. It was a catastrophe. They should have done it before coming here. We did it before coming here.’

‘It is possible that they would not have been ready before coming here,’ said Jenny.

Zaniwe flapped her hands about. ‘We were the bridesmaids,’ she said. ‘Cinnabar’s family is Reformed Independent Neo-Anglican, so she wanted the ceremony done properly. They had to improvise a bit, though. Captain Kamotja stood in for the father of the bride and was best man, or woman, or whatever.’

‘We cut some of the coloured plants from the undergrowth to substitute for flowers,’ said Jenny. ‘The Chaplain was astonished when he discovered the chapel was full of them.’

‘Everybody crammed in there. Cinnabar and Byerley had borrowed a couple of uniforms from the crew. They looked great.’

‘We got about as far as “Dearly beloved” when one of the kids started crying.’

‘Don’t tell me,’ said Benny.

‘She was only four,’ said Jenny. ‘She was levitating. It terrified her.’

‘We had to stop everything while Byerley got her down from the ceiling and took her to the lab.’

‘A catastrophe,’ repeated Jenny.

‘So, when are they planning another try?’ said Benny, trying to make herself narrower as she snuggled down between them.

‘Dunno.’ Zaniwe yawned. ‘They’re probably waiting for all of this to resolve itself before they try again.’ She reached over and put the lantern out.

‘There’s something I’ve been meaning to ask,’ said Benny sleepily. ‘Why didn’t the Captain call off-world for a medical team? Byerley’s good, but he could use some help.’

‘We came here because we believed we could look after ourselves,’ said Jenny. ‘It would be a mark of failure to ask for assistance now.’

‘Eep,’ said Benny. ‘I hope this doesn’t mean our help is a sort of insult.’

‘Don’t be ridiculous.’ Zaniwe elbowed her in the back.

‘Go to sleep.’

Couldn’t get the canopy open.

Chris was dreaming that he was walking through the forest. In the dream, he was wading through water that was almost knee deep, struggling to move his legs and keep his eyes open, the way you do in dreams.

Got caught in the blast.

It became harder and harder to keep battling along in the darkness. He banged his foot onto something and tripped over.

When he woke up, he was astonished to find himself actually in the forest.

‘Whoa,’ he said out loud. ‘Brain check.’

He flinched at the volume of his voice. It was nearly pitch black; the tops of the trees were defined by the stars they blocked out.

Finagle’s nostrils! Where was he? And what was he doing out here? Sleepwalking? He couldn’t remember ever having done that before. How long had he been wandering about like this?

His bare feet were soaked with dew, and he was freezing cold. He was just wearing the stuff he’d gone to sleep in, a Jets T-shirt with a huge hole under one arm and a pair of old tracksuit pants. The last thing he remembered was muttering

‘Lights off’. They’d been staying in the TARDIS, for once; the colony just didn’t have room for them.

Chris squinted. Was that a glimmer of light through the trees? It must be the habitat dome, or one of the surrounding buildings. The TARDIS was parked barely fifty metres from the base, an odd blue bump in the even field. He set off in the general direction of the light.

He jumped back as a low-hanging frond brushed against his face. He reached out to the celery-stick tree, leaned against it while he got his balance back.

A flash of heat so huge it went right through him, from one side to the other. Flame blossomed across his skin as his fur kindled. He tried to scream, but his mouth was full of fire.

He ought to be safe in the TARDIS. Safe from anything.

If he had to, he'd just stay there. There was no point in making a fuss about it. He might not be much use to anyone, but he'd just stay inside.

Chris!

He whirled around, fingernails raking at the juicy bark of the tree. 'Who's there?' he yelled, like a frightened kid.

But there wasn't anyone there. He frowned.

'There's no point in making a fuss about it,' he told himself, and set off for the TARDIS.

Benny poked her head out of the tent. 'It's stopped raining,'

she said.

Zaniwe and Jenny muttered and stretched as the archaeologist climbed out, glad of her big coat. The ground was soaked, the stones slick with water. The waterfall had swollen, sending great clouds of spray into the air. The morning light was refracted through the drifting droplets.

She unzipped the front of her tube tent. Water rushed out in a puddle around her boots. She looked down in disgust.

'D'you think it's fixable?' said Zaniwe, wriggling free of the tent. 'No offence, but I don't think I want to play sardines again...'

Benny grimaced, kneeling down by the side of the tube.

'I've got a patch kit, but they're not very large. I'll try putting a couple on.'

'Wait until after breakfast,' said Zaniwe, yawning hugely.

'Ration cubes once more,' said Jenny, emerging.

'Scrumplicious,' said Zaniwe, sticking out her tongue.

‘We can heat them up a bit, I guess.’

‘Can we eat any of the native plants without our heads exploding?’ said Benny, dragging her sodden sleeping-bag out of the tent.

‘We don’t have the list of edible species with us,’ said Jenny shortly. ‘Ration cubes it is.’

Benny hung her sleeping-bag over a tree branch to dry while Zaniwe cranked up the portable electric stove. If only a soggy sleeping-bag and an unappetizing breakfast were the worst problems on the planet.

She tugged at the tube tent’s support lines. Maybe this was the reason the Doctor had asked her to come out here

— nothing more sinister than realizing she needed a bit of a break. A spot of fresh air and a bit of rummaging about in some interesting alien ruins. She could get back to worrying about the colonists when she got back to the colony.

Heck, she hadn’t even brought any booze.

‘I’ve even got the knack of this bloody tent,’ she said out loud, pushing it back from the opening at the front. It obligingly accordioned back until it was only a foot long, leaving the rip still visible. She picked it up, tipped it to get the last of the water out, and hung it on the tree.

Zaniwe handed her a lukewarm cube, still in its wrapper.

She tugged at the plastic, and a small burst of spinach-flavoured steam escaped into the chilly morning air.

‘So what’s a nice girl like you doing on a frontier world like this?’ said Zaniwe.

‘Oh, we just dropped in,’ Benny obfuscated. ‘We travel a lot. And the Doctor’s always poking his nose into other people’s business.’

‘I am glad you are here.’ Jenny was perched on a rock, breaking off little pieces of crumbly cube in her fingers. ‘It is just surprising to encounter travellers this far out.’

Change the subject. ‘What made *you* decide to come here?’

Zaniwe laughed. ‘We were bored. It’s very boring being stuffed into a three-metre-by-three-metre flat. It’s very very boring to have a degree in xenobiology and no aliens to study.’

Jenny said, ‘We have a plan. It is not legitimate to name a species after oneself. Therefore, as we classify Yemaya’s flora and fauna, we will name them after one another.’

Benny giggled. ‘You could really make it big,’ she said, ‘if you can study the planet’s previous inhabitants.’ A sudden thought hit her. ‘You don’t suppose they’re not previous at all…’

Jenny looked around at the trees. Zaniwe shook her head. ‘Come on, those ruins are *ruins*. Even from the photos, it’s obvious that they haven’t been in use for a long, long time.’

Make no assumptions.

‘I’d better try and patch up this tent.’

As she walked back to the tree, her boot collided with something. She looked down, then squatted.

It was a long, sharp rock, sticking up like a blunt shark’s fin from the soil. ‘I think,’ she said, fingering the edge, ‘I’ve found out how my tent got holed.’

There was something odd about the rock. She tugged at it, and it came away from the soil easily. It was heavier than she’d expected.

And there was writing on it.

Benny stared at the red shapes behind the dirt. She brushed at the stone with her fingers, trying to make it out more clearly. This was going to be one of the easier archaeological discoveries ever made.

‘What is it?’ said Jenny, coming over to take a look.

‘Ye gods and little fishes,’ said Benny aloud.

Jenny peered at the piece of rock. No. The piece of metal.

It said, in faded letters, DO NOT.

4 The Queen’s Temple

The Doctor had been awake all night, but that was normal for him. One good night’s sleep could last him a couple of weeks.

Byerley was not so fortunate. Cinnabar had dispatched Cwej and Forrester to remove her fiancé bodily from the lab and bring him home. Now she was watching the Doctor finish off their research, typing so fast on the little medical computer that she could barely follow.

'Do you think you're going to be able to find a cure?' she said.

'I'm not sure. Yet.' He tapped the computer screen, and a DNA diagram appeared. 'The lab work's done. We've sequenced the virus. I'm hoping we can use what we've learned about its genetic code to build our own virus. One which switches the latent genes back off again.'

'Fighting fire with fire.'

'Yes. But look here. That code takes up only this much of the virus.' He pointed to the diagram.

'That's only about a quarter. What's the rest of it for?'

'We're still trying to work that out. This sequence particularly worries me.'

Cinnabar peered at the sequence as though it meant something to her. 'What is it?'

'It codes for part of the protein coat of the common cold.

The part which allows it to attach itself to human cells.'

She was going to make a joke, when she realized what he meant. 'Then it could be transmitted the same way as a cold. Through the air.'

The Doctor nodded. 'We've been able to isolate the actual protein. The gene's only active in about four per cent of the samples, but it's enough to infect anyone who missed out on an inoculation. Whoever created the virus obviously wanted a backup.'

'Maybe the Smith-Smiths have got it right,' said Chris, from the doorway.

'Ah, good. Come here, the pair of you. We might as well get this over with.'

The Doctor got up and pulled some sample-takers from a drawer. Roz

held out her hand. The sample-taker pricked her finger and drew the bead of blood into a capillary tube.

Chris was still hanging back in the doorway. ‘It doesn’t hurt,’ the Doctor promised. Roz lifted an eyebrow at Chris, smiling at his sudden reluctance.

He grimaced, and proffered his hand. ‘I don’t like the idea of anyone messing around with my genes,’ he said. Roz barked a laugh. ‘Body-bepple is *different*,’ protested Chris.

‘Just a moment...’ The Doctor took his samples over to the bench, rummaged through the equipment.

‘I *chose* to have a body-bepple done,’ Chris was saying.

‘And I didn’t get any brain enhancements.’

‘There’s a *kgotla* this morning,’ Roz told Byerley.

The medic nodded. ‘I’ve just read the e-mail from Captain Kamotja announcing the meeting. We’re going to be bringing our results. It’s about time we decided what the hell to do.’

‘Thought so,’ announced the Doctor. ‘You’re both antibody positive.’

The Adjudicators looked at him.

‘Don’t worry,’ said the Doctor. ‘You’ve probably been infected since shortly after we arrived. If you had any symptoms, they would have shown up by now.’

Chris glanced at Roz, and away again quickly. ‘What about Benny?’ he said.

‘She’s probably been infected too, but since she hasn’t shown any symptoms, we don’t need to worry. Unless, of course, there are more surprises packaged inside the bug.

Things we haven’t discovered yet.’ He drummed his fingers on the bench. ‘In a way, pricking myself with that wretched needle was serendipity. Look at this.’

He pulled up another DNA schematic on the computer, and they crowded around. ‘This is from a sample of my blood which Byerley took when I was still infected. What you’re looking at is a tiny piece of someone’s personality. Think of it as a computer virus, trying to

overwrite the “software” of the mind. That sequence is different in different samples of the virus.’

‘The “software” is mutating?’

‘No. I think someone took a whole lot of memories, and put just a few of them into each of the original viral particles.’

His eyes glinted in the light from the screen as he pored over the schematic. ‘We might be able to put them back together.

Work out who they were. And why they’ve tried to turn five hundred people into a library of their past experiences.’

The sun was coming up over the top of the temple when they walked into the clearing.

They stopped for a moment, silent. Even though Zaniwe and Jenny had seen the temple twice before. Even though Benny had seen dozens of temples on dozens of worlds.

They put down their packs, eyes glued to the building, eighty feet high.

It was nearly invisible until you were in the clearing. The open area wasn’t more than a hundred feet across, and the undergrowth was thick, pushing up around the bases of the buildings. They crunched through it as they slowly circled the site.

Benny was still feeling slightly bizarre after their discovery of the piece of — presumably — a spacecraft.

They’d used a metal detector to find more bits and pieces, scattered under the soil of the clearing, mostly smaller than her hand. Several of them had writing on them, in English and Kiswahili, mostly safety instructions.

Zaniwe and Jenny said that the planet had been surveyed three or four times before the colonists had arrived; it was possible that the bit of shrapnel was from one of those ships, or maybe a smaller vehicle. They’d have to check the survey records when they got back to see if anything had been lost.

There were ten huts clustered at the western end of the clearing, stones glistening wetly, (thatched? mud?) roofs long since gone. The walls were tumbled down and eroded. Plants grew inside them like

thick, green carpet. Climbers had wound their way up the stones of some of the buildings.

Benny matched them to her mental image of the site from the holograms. She walked into the centre of the clearing. ‘There’s a thirty-foot margin around the temple itself,’ she called out. ‘There are so few huts… unless we find similar structures hidden in the surrounding forest, I’d say they travelled here specifically to carry out rituals.’

‘The rituals must have been lengthy,’ said Jenny.

Benny found herself drawn across the margin to the temple itself. For a moment, following the lines of its sharp ascent, she felt dizzy. ‘They were tall,’ she said, as Zaniwe and Jenny came up behind her. ‘Look at the height of the steps.’

The temple was a ziggurat, dull-edged with time. It was unornamented. No writing, no symbols. Except at the top, where two glyphs looked down at them like a pair of eyes.

And the pock-marks of what might be bullets or small-blaster fire, a random trail of circular blemishes in the rock.

The last record left by the Yemayans.

‘This design’s very common in Earth’s part of the galaxy,’

said Benny. The glyphs were complex — she’d need a closer look. ‘There’s probably some Exxilon or Osirian influence.’

‘I wonder if we can find any of their writing?’

‘Yemaya well ask,’ said Benny.

She was about to climb up onto the first step when Jenny put a hand on her arm. ‘Wait,’ she said.

Benny waited, arms folded, while Jenny went back to her Pack. She returned with a bundle of cloth. She sat down on the ground and unrolled it. There were candles and incense inside.

Benny squatted down. ‘What is it?’

‘If this place is a tomb,’ said Jenny, fitting the candles into their holders, ‘or if sacrifices were made here, then we should ask permission of the dead before proceeding.’

Benny opened her mouth and closed it again. Then she nodded. ‘Let’s do that.’

Benny and Zaniwe stood back a little while Jenny carefully lit one of the candles with a battery-powered lighter.

She picked up the other two candles and lit them from the centre one, and finally the incense.

Zaniwe shut her eyes, humming something. Benny bowed her head, feeling awkward. She didn’t have anything to pray to, not these days. She’d seen too many miracles.

Getting jaded in your old age, Summerfield, she told herself.

Here you are standing at the foot of an ancient temple centuries in your own past, and you —

‘Bernice!’ said Jenny.

‘What?’

Jenny pointed past the flickering candles. Benny knelt down, peering at the stones of the first step.

‘What is it?’ said Zaniwe, somewhere behind her.

Benny rummaged in her pocket for a Swiss army knife.

She unfolded the magnifying glass, looked more closely still.

‘Well, raise my rent!’ she said, her nose almost touching the silvery grey stone. ‘There’s writing. It’s tiny, but it’s writing. Pass me my notebook, will you?’

Captain Kamotja of the Dione-Kisumu Company fleet gripped the podium, took a deep breath, and said, ‘I hope you’re not expecting an easy solution from me, because I don’t have one.’

She looked around at the colonists assembled for the *kgotla*. They were mostly sitting on the ground, though some had brought chairs from their rooms or from the common area. ‘There are some things I can tell you, though.

‘Most importantly, there is no question of isolating anyone who has developed psychic powers. We’ll deal with these new abilities on an individual basis as best we can. In fact, once we learn how to use

them, I'm hoping they'll be an asset to the colony.

'But it looks like someone has deliberately done this to us, and we're going to do something about it.

'In the meantime, we have to keep on with the development plan. You all know how important that is. The epidemic has put us a couple of weeks behind schedule.

We're going to have to work hard to make up that time.

'Hang in there, folks. We're going to make this colony work, no matter what they throw at us.

'OK, who's next?'

Byerley leaned over to the Doctor and Roz as a muscular man took the stand. 'That's Dimitri Molokomme,' he whispered. 'He's in charge of agriculture.'

Molokomme licked his lips. 'I don't think it's up to the Captain to decide what we're going to do about people with the bug. I think we should take a vote on it.'

'Damn,' muttered Byerley. 'I wish I'd gotten up there first.'

'I know what you're thinking,' said Molokomme, and laughed awkwardly at the unintentional joke. 'We can't run the colony with nine-tenths of the people. But we can't run it with people with powers out of control, either. One of the reasons we're behind schedule is equipment damage caused by psychokinesis. And then there are the telepaths...'

Now a murmur did run through the crowd. There were around four hundred of them, mostly adults, filling the field beside the habitat dome and spilling over onto the edges of the ploughed land. Almost the entire population of Yemaya 4.

'You know what I mean,' said Molokomme. 'I...' and he banged his chest with his fist. 'I want my thoughts to be private.'

Byerley was heading for the podium almost before the Doctor and Roz knew it. Molokomme moved aside uneasily, obviously still full of unsaid words. Byerley bent the microphone down and said, 'More than a dozen people have quietly asked me the same thing. Dimitri is the first person to make that request public.'

He shut his eyes, visibly bringing himself back under control. '"Whatever I see or hear when treating someone I will keep to myself — believing it shameful to talk about that sort of thing." That's the oath I swore when they made me a doctor. Do you understand? I am not going to start outing people.'

Molokomme said something. Byerley leaned on the podium, head in hand, while the taller man took the microphone back. 'Some people here don't need to ask you for that kind of information,' he said. 'They only need to look into your head.'

'Listen,' said Byerley. The microphone squealed with feedback, and he thumped it on the podium. 'What's going to happen if we start dividing up into little groups? The whole development plan depends on our working together.' He looked up into the audience. 'Athaliah,' he said, 'come up here.'

Roz craned her neck to follow the audience's suddenly redirected gaze. It was a slender teenage girl, her hand politely raised. She got up and wended her way down to the podium. They had to bend the microphone all the way down for her.

'I just want to say,' she began calmly, 'that I have telepathy now. That means I know how scared everybody is.

I don't have to look inside your heads to know that. You sort of — broadcast. Anyway,' she hurried, 'I just want to say that I wouldn't ever try to read someone's mind if they didn't want me to. And that's all I want to say.'

She went back to where she was sitting, looking down at the grass, as though feeling the pressure of all those eyes trained on her. All those minds.

The Doctor touched Roz on the shoulder as someone else shuffled up to the podium. 'Let's go for a walk,' he said.

Roz waited until they were in the forest, the amplified voice of whoever was speaking echoing indistinctly behind them. 'It's an iceberg, isn't it?'

He looked at her quizzically.

'The virus is an iceberg. All those extra genes, waiting below the surface for... something.' She picked up a stick, prodded the ground with it as she walked. 'The whole situation is like an iceberg. There's

stuff going on under the surface that we haven't even noticed yet.'

'I knew that as soon as I read about it next century,' said the Doctor. 'An outbreak of psychic powers, in a small, isolated group with known genetics... It's extremely difficult to trigger latent human psi. And besides, we know Benny has some latent ability, so why hasn't it been brought out? This had to be an experiment.'

'So do you know who's behind it?'

'I have a pretty good idea.' He shook his head. 'The time isn't right to confront them yet. To tell you the truth, right now I'm much more worried about the Trojan Horse memories than the powers themselves. Anyone can rig up a bug that turns on latent genes. But one that infects people with someone's recollections?'

'And you can't remember any of it.'

'In getting rid of the virus, I got rid of all the memory RNA.'

'Well, can't you... remember remembering?'

'No. It's like forgetting a phone number that you dial all the time.' Roz looked at him blankly. 'Or when you forget the date of someone's birthday, even though you've known them for years. We're just lucky I was the only one to get the booby prize. A human might have been left with gaps where their own memories had been overwritten.'

'And then,' said Roz, 'there's you. Nine-tenths below the surface.'

He frowned, his eyes unfocusing as he gazed off into the trees.

'No.'

He looked up at her with a start. 'What?'

'You're thinking, "I should reinfect myself with a few strains of the virus. See what comes up." If you as much as *think* about it, I'll lock you in the TARDIS myself.'

He looked at her with such intensity that she found herself blinking. 'Roz,' he said, 'how did you know what I was thinking?'

She burst out laughing. 'I just know how you think!

Nothing gets between you and what you want to find out.'

He blew out a relieved breath. ‘I wasn’t that worried,’ he murmured. ‘Few human telepaths can get past the shields into a Time Lord’s mind. But your mind, on the other hand…’

Roz nodded. I’ve been thinking about that. I don’t want anybody rummaging about in my head, even accidentally.

And I’m sure Benny and Chris will be thinking the same thing, so to speak. Can we do anything about it?’

‘I may have to cobble together a few psi dampeners. But these people don’t have a clue how to use their powers. At most, they’ll pick up the odd stray thought. Anyway, to a telepath, dampening fields sound like you’re *buzzing* all the time.’

They grinned at one another.

‘I’m serious about locking you in the TARDIS,’ said Roz.

‘I believe you.’

‘First rule of first aid. Don’t become a casualty yourself.

Doesn’t it piss you off?’

‘Being threatened with abduction by my own companions?’

‘Having someone muck about with your head.’ She raised her voice. ‘They have *no right* to do that to you — or anyone else here.’

The Doctor put a hand on her arm. ‘This really disturbs you, doesn’t it?’

‘You bet it does,’ she said furiously. ‘You hang onto your beliefs, you hang onto yourself, then someone comes up with a way to change all that. With a sodding cold germ!’ He patted her arm, gingerly. ‘Do you ever get used to it?’

‘Getting taken over?’ He laughed shortly. ‘Business as usual. If there’s one thing I’ve learned in the last millennium or so, it’s how to stay myself. You have to be able to do that when your face could be different tomorrow.’ He fingered the end of his paisley scarf. ‘That’s one reason I like to wear roughly the same clothes, you know. It gives me a bit of stability. A bit of control.’

Roz threw away her stick. ‘I wish there was something more tangible to fight. Chris and I have been feeling surplus to requirements. We

can't arrest a bug.'

'I know how you feel. You can't out-think a virus, either.'

'Doctor?'

'Yes?'

'Did you really accidentally stick yourself with that needle?'

'Yes, of course. I couldn't have known the virus would affect me in any way. Don't worry, Roz, it was just a stupid accident. I'm not about to use myself as a guinea-pig.'

They had come out of the forest again. Across the fields, the Yemayans were still arguing.

'What do you suppose they'll decide to do?' asked Roz.

'Byerley will explain that there's no danger of infection, and that no-one else will develop powers. I doubt it'll make much difference. They'll either find a way to stick together, or they'll find a way to fall apart.'

Benny was lying in the grass, very still. From time to time, her lips moved.

'A-ha!' she said, out loud.

Zaniwe crunched through the undergrowth, sat down on the step next to where she was lying. 'What have you got?'

Benny sat up, stretching her kinked muscles, and leaned back against the stone. Zaniwe leaned over to see her notes: precise copies of the tiny symbols. 'I don't think anyone was supposed to see these,' she said.

'Whoever wrote them sure didn't make them easy to see.'

'There's that,' said Benny. 'And there's the complete lack of writing anywhere else on the structure.'

'Graffiti?'

'Possibly. But it looks to me as though these inscriptions were made in the stone before the temple was built. They don't flow continuously.'

‘Maybe they’re just stonemasons’ marks.’

‘Possibly. A lot of it is the same short phrases, repeated over and over. Look at this.’ Benny held up her notepad Page, pointed to a symbol she’d transcribed. ‘There are definite similarities between this language and several others in the area. Some of the symbols are nearly identical to Ikkaban and D’nasian glyphs.’

‘But… Zaniwe glanced up at the temple. ‘Surely these People weren’t capable of space travel?’

‘They didn’t need to be. Civilizations like the Ikkaba and the D’nasians helped spread Exxilon culture throughout this area. There are half a dozen worlds where the native languages develop up to a point, and then are suddenly replaced by one of the Exxilon ones.’

‘Is that right?’

‘This symbol,’ said Benny, ‘— actually, it’s two symbols joined together by that crossbar. You see?’

Zaniwe peered closer. It was a… flower? Joined to an egg? Something like that.

‘ *Roses and souls*,’ said Benny. ‘The line over the top indicates a plural.’

‘What does it mean?’

‘ *Roses and souls* is the Ikkaban metaphor for sacrifice.

I’ve seen it on altars on three different planets. The rose isn’t really a rose, of course; that’s just how Hadley translated it in her monograph. For that matter, given Ikkaban theology, the soul isn’t really a soul.’

‘Benny,’ said Zaniwe, ‘I’ve been a student of archaeology for ten years, and I’ve never heard of any of this.’

Benny looked at her over her shoulder. ‘Well… um. Well, that’s because Hadley hasn’t actually been born yet.’

‘I see.’

‘Um…’

‘Are you sure you should be telling me this, if you’re from the future?’

Benny laughed. ‘I’m sure that’s my line. Or something like it. I don’t

think it's going to do much harm, so long as Hadley doesn't get hold of my notes... but then, maybe that's how she did the translations in the first place... sorry, I'm thinking out loud again.'

'Why? Why'd you come here from the future?'

'It's the Doctor,' said Benny. 'He travels around in time and space. Chris and Roz and me, we're passengers.'

'Why does he do that, then?'

'He gets bored easily. And he wants to save the universe. Look, we don't have a hidden agenda. We heard a rumour about the infections, and we wanted to come and see what really happened.'

'A rumour,' said Zaniwe. 'You mean, you read about us in your history.'

Benny glanced at her sideways and nodded. 'As usual, things were more complicated than we thought.'

Zaniwe regarded her, head tilted to one side. 'It's just that it's an odd coincidence,' she said. 'Someone has done this to us. The virus, I mean. And you folks showed up...'

'A week *after* the first outbreak,' Benny reminded her.

Zaniwe grinned. 'Okay, future girl,' she said, 'I'd better go and see what Jenny's up to.'

Benny smiled as she watched the woman go. Her smile faded a little as she wondered whether the Doctor did have another reason for their visit. One that he was keeping to himself. What was he up to, back at the colony? Had he expected her to find the pieces of spaceship? The Ikkaban writing?

Cruk. She was getting paranoid.

She turned back to her notepad, craned her neck, looking at the pair of glyphs at the top of the temple. Looked back at her notepad.

'Right there,' she said, tapping the symbols with her pencil. 'Right there. *Something-Temple*. No, *Someone-Temple*.'

She rolled over, lying on her back, looking up at the top of the stairs.

'But whose temple were you?' she asked.

5 Hear no Evil

Cinnabar's lab had once been the busiest part of the colony; she had been in charge of assembling all the equipment (borrowed, begged, stolen) they had brought with them, as well as setting up the colony's computer system (generously provided by the Company). Now that part of the work was over, her lab was almost empty, and she could get on with chasing the bugs out of the mainframe.

She sat sideways in her chair, half folded up, an ergonomic nightmare. From time to time she picked up a piece of crumbled ration cube from a plate beside her on the bench.

'All right, WATCH OUT!' she told the screen. 'Let's try again. Give me a full report on the system's status.'

'Yes boss! Right away!' WATCH OUT!'s voice was a high-pitched buzz. The AI's icon, a pocket-watch on a spring, bounced all over the screen. 'Just a minute!'

Cinnabar sat back, stretching her shoulders. The half-dozen AIs that formed her staff were commercial jobs, assembly-line artificial intelligences. She'd modified them to give them more personality. She wouldn't get any human assistants unless the colony developed on schedule.

A small icon, a rectangle with a triangle in it, appeared in the corner of her screen. 'CONNECTICUT,' she said, 'I thought I told you to hold my e-mail.'

'Ummmmm . Hey! Some jerk bypassed me!' The communications daemon's voice was deeper and gruffer than WATCH OUT!'s. ' Do you want to take the message, or will I tell 'em to get lost?'

'Oh, put it through. This system sweep is going to take a few minutes.' Cinnabar watched as a small box appeared in the corner of the screen. After a moment, it turned into the Doctor.

'I'm sorry to disturb you,' he said, tipping his hat at the camera. But I wanted to check your mainframe to see whether there were any traces of those alien memories.'

'If you could bypass CONNECTICUT,' she said, 'why didn't you just poke around in there until you found what you wanted?'

‘Sorry about that,’ said the Doctor. ‘I talked him into it.’

‘Hmmph. Well, I forgive you. Look, stay where you are —

I’ll get WATCH OUT! to give you a hand when we’re finished here.’

‘Thank you.’

‘Do you really think there’ll be anything there?’

‘No. But it’s worth pursuing any possibility. You missed the *kgotla*.’

‘Yep. I hate politics. Did they decide anything?’

‘They’re still talking.’

‘Mmm-hmm. They’re too scared to jump either way.

Something will happen that’ll force a decision. But not yet.’

‘Perhaps,’ said the Doctor. ‘In the meantime...’

‘Got it boss! Here you go!’ WATCH OUT! was back, throwing windows full of text all over the screen. ‘That last modification worked — everything’s peachy!’

‘Thanks. Listen, I have a job for you...’

Exploration and Recovery was a tiny office near the centre of the habitat dome, without so much as a skylight. Benny perched awkwardly on the edge of a low desk, while Professor Dorothy Smith-Smith looked through her transcription.

She looked around the small room. It was amazing how much junk could accumulate, even in a computer-based society. There were even filing-cabinets. Benny wondered what Dot was keeping in there. If the bridesmaids were right, the temple was the only archaeological find on the planet so far.

Dot’s translation drone hovered next to her shoulder.

How did a small cylinder of plastic with a blue light at one end manage to look nervous? Benny supposed that, if she were on the receiving end of Dot’s temper all day, she’d probably be nervous too. She stifled a smile as the woman put down the papers.

Dot raised a hand to her right temple, waved her fingers about. The

drone said, «It's a puzzle.» It turned slightly to get a better view of her hands. «Where's the rest of the ruins?»

Benny was holding a notepad in her lap. She picked up a fat black marker and wrote, 'Hidden under the jungle?'

The drone hummed uncertainly as Dot drummed her fingers, waiting for Benny to finish her sentence and hold up the notepad. She scowled at the message. «I am *not* impressed with the surveyors.»

The drone's voice rushed, trying to cram the meaning down into spoken words. «That temple's right out in the open.

They should at least have found that.»

Dot leaned forwards. Her pale blonde hair was pulled back from her head in a severe hairstyle, making her look like a cartoon librarian. «I don't understand how I'm supposed to do my job without proper information.» SKREEE! whirred the drone as she signed something obscene. «I don't even have my staff. What have you done with them?»

'Cleaning up,' wrote Benny on her notepad. 'Want to wait?'

«For God's sake, speak English.»

Benny made a face as Dot turned back to the transcription. The deaf woman traced a long finger over the sketch of the symbols from the top of the temple. «Do you recognize these?»

Benny was writing, 'No, do you?' when the drone spoke up.

«Yes, I do. I want to do this one piece at a time. Starting from the beginning.»

Benny frowned, putting down her notepad. Dot tapped her finger on the first of the symbols. She put her right hand on top of her left hand and flicked her thumbs forwards, once, again: «Tortoise.»

Dot smiled tightly at Benny's surprise. «T-U-R-T-L-E,»

she fingerspelled, just for emphasis.

'But the Turtle cult wasn't discovered until next century,'

said Benny out loud, involuntarily. 'How can you—'

«I've written an encyclopedia on Exxilon culture and its derivatives. Haven't you read it?»

Benny stared at her, long and hard. Dot held absolutely still, glaring back at her. The drone hummed awkwardly, trying to read her body language.

Benny deliberately turned her back, looking at a chart on the wall behind her, and said, 'We only study your encyclopedia in lectures on the history of archaeology.'

«If you're from the future,» said the drone, «why didn't you simply bring a translation back with you?»

Benny turned around again. Dot was still absolutely rigid, but a single tear was meandering down her cheek.

'You heard me,' said Benny.

«I did not,» said the drone.

Benny picked up her notepad. 'SICKBAY', she wrote in huge letters.

Dot collapsed back in her chair, almost knocking the drone aside. «Who has done this to us?» she signed, convulsively. Her fist clenched as she moved her index finger in a tiny circle, over and over. «Who? Who?»

Chris Cwej sat by himself in the common area. Burning.

Couldn't get the canopy open saw the wall coming up managed to get the emergency release to work and jumped free got caught in the blast.

There were two men sitting at the next table, talking heatedly. 'Look, it would only be a temporary measure.'

'Oh yes? And if the changes are permanent?'

Are you saying we should just let telepaths walk around?

With no way of knowing who they are?'

'You tell me. You tell me what comes after making them wear an identity marker. Sewing patches on their crukking clothes?'

'It's nothing like that.'

‘And what about you? I hear your boy is a psychokinetic now. What kind of marker do you think he should wear?’

‘That’s *different*!’ The man’s voice jumped an octave. ‘We deserve to know who might be reading our minds.’

‘Yeah, and we deserve to know who might be able to scramble us up from the inside. Even accidentally.’

‘You *son* of a—’

The insult was cut off by a fist.

But Chris wasn’t listening to any of it.

The fireball blasted the flitter into fragments. They rained down around him as he rolled and rolled.

Burning.

Chris!

He got up and got out of the common area as the fight burst out behind him.

Someone put their hands over the Doctor’s eyes. ‘Guess who.’

He sat back from the medical computer. ‘Ah… the Terrible Zodin?’

‘Nope.’

‘The Priestess Enheduanna.’

‘Try again.’

‘Bernice Summerfield in a silly mood?’

She gave him a hug. ‘How’d you guess?’

‘How was your field trip?’

‘Fun. It was fun. I took pages of notes. Dot Smith-Smith thinks the temple’s from the Turtle cult. It’ll be quite a find, if that’s the case.’ Benny’s cheerful grin shut itself off. ‘She’s gone and caught the bug, though. She’s livid.’

‘I know. She was in here half an hour ago, railing at Byerley. I can’t

say I blame her.'

'Why? What did Byerley do?'

'No, no, he was just the nearest target.' He sat back from the computer and looked up at her. 'She doesn't care for the idea of being "cured". Her family tried to have a cybernetic audio system implanted in her skull. She got a court order against them to stop the surgery. She was eight years old.'

Benny puffed out her cheeks. 'No wonder the SmithSmiths were happy to leave her behind when they locked themselves into their little dome.'

'That's the ironic thing. She brought them with her. Their religion's from one of the Sidereal Baptist Reclamation groups.'

'Strong family ties.'

'They also believe that using psi powers is a sin.'

'You're joking.'

He shook his head. 'They consider it a form of sorcery.

Dot wanted drugs to suppress her telepathy.'

'What did Byerley say?'

'He hasn't got anything that specific. He could keep her tranquillized, but what would be the point?'

Benny shook her head. 'If there's one thing that's true of religions throughout the universe,' she said, 'it's that they can make people do funny things.'

'Which brings us back to your Turtle.'

Benny folded her arms. 'If I'd known I'd be tripping over an Ikkaban temple, I'd have read up a bit before we came here.'

'How much do you know about them?'

'Truth is, nobody really knows a damn thing about the Ikkaba. Nobody even knows what they looked like.'

The Doctor's computer pinged. 'Sorry, boss!' squeaked a voice. 'I can't

see anything in there that matches your search parameters.'

'That's all right, WATCH OUT!. Go back to Cinnabar.'

'Over and out!'

Benny smiled at the screen as the icon did a backflip and vanished. 'Who's your little friend?'

'Cinnabar has half a dozen artificial intelligences running her computer systems. WATCH OUT! is her handyprogram. I was hoping he could locate something in the computer left behind by... whoever put their memories into the virus.'

Benny frowned. 'No luck?'

'If we're very lucky, I may never find out.'

She handed him her transcript. 'Well, I found what looks like a repetitive poem scratched around the base of the temple. Dot's going to set her interpreter drone loose on it.

We're hoping it can extrapolate backwards from a D'nasian syllabary to make some sense of it.'

'Scratched,' said the Doctor. 'That's unusual. It wouldn't have occurred to the Ikkaba to write in stone.'

Benny rolled her eyes. 'Of course, you probably used to have afternoon tea with them.'

'Not at all,' said the Doctor seriously, peering at the writing. 'I found them very... disturbing. They had some strange ideas about death.'

'I can remember a furious debate between two of my lecturers on that very topic,' said Benny. 'No-one knows whether the temples were used for human sacrifice —. hell, that's awkward. Ikkaban sacrifice? No-one knows whether Ikkaba killed Ikkaba as sacrifices to the Turtle.'

'Of course not,' said the Doctor. 'That would be murder.'

'You said they had some strange ideas about death.'

The Doctor picked up a writing stylus and started making tiny scribbles in the margins of the transcript. 'Look here,' he said. Benny squinted at his writing.

Never she them anything request

But they her roses-and-souls bring

‘It’s a good thing they never went into advertising,’ said Benny dryly.

‘Sorry,’ said the Doctor, ‘I’m just translating the symbols literally…’ He turned the pen around in his hands, and added two more lines.

She never asks them for anything

But they bring her roses and souls

Benny said, ‘What does it mean?’

‘We’ll need to translate the whole poem to find out who *she* and *they* are. But she’s probably the Turtle.’

‘The Turtle? I thought the Turtle was a symbol, not a person. Or a goddess.’

‘A symbol, yes. Life. Death. Resurrection.’ He looked up at her. ‘The Ikkaba used to kill themselves at her temple.

Never more than one at a time, never in front of an audience, but they went into the fire one after the other. I never did manage to find out why.’

Zaniwe was with Dot Smith-Smith in her office when the Doctor came to visit. She moved automatically to face the archaeologist as the Doctor doffed his hat and said, ‘Good afternoon. I wanted to see if you had made any progress with the Ikkaban writing.’

Dot watched the dance of Zaniwe’s hands. Her drone said, «It’s a repetitive poem, a very traditional format. Please don’t ask me to go to sickbay.»

The Doctor sat down, unasked. He signed, «Have you contacted your family?»

Zaniwe moved out of the way. Dot was shaking her head. «We said goodbye when I decided to stay in the dome.

And look where it got me.»

«They’re infected too,» signed the Doctor gently.

«Everyone is. But it only has an effect on people carrying latent psi genes.»

«Including me.» Dot bounced her index finger off her chest, angrily.

«Including you.»

«You seem to know an awful lot about this, Doctor.»

«I wish I knew more. The question now is, why? Why infect an entire

colony?»

«We're an experiment.»

«I'm not so sure,» signed the Doctor, but Dot had got up from her desk. The drone trailed behind her as she tried to pace in the tiny space.

"The truth is,» signed Dot, almost as though she were talking to herself, «I don't care why they did it. I want to know who they are.» She looked at him. «My family owns the largest solar power company in Australia. Whoever did this is going to find themselves in very serious trouble.»

«We have a theory,» signed the Doctor, «but we're still

—»

«D,» signed Dot, index finger and thumb curving against the opposite palm. The Doctor stared at her, his hands still in the air. «D-I-O-N-E-K-I-S-U-M-U,» she spelt.

'You ought not,' he said slowly, 'to have been able to do that.'

«Blame the Dione-Kisumu Company.» She looked at him fiercely. «They will pay. And so will anyone else who has anything to do with this.»

6 Death in a Nest of Spices

When the Doctor shouted at him, Chris nearly jumped out of his skin.

It wasn't the surprise; the Doctor had walked up to him in the common area, smiling. It wasn't what he shouted, just

'Chris!'. It was the fact that he did it without opening his mouth.

'Oh,' said Cwej. 'What a give-away.'

'I think we'd better talk,' said the Doctor, out loud. 'Don't you?'

Cinnabar was wearing a borrowed DKC uniform when she went to Dot Smith-Smith's office. Dot was pounding at a keyboard furiously. The translation drone did a little loop-the-loop as though to acknowledge the newcomer's presence, but Dot didn't look up.

Cinnabar waited patiently for Dot to finish whatever she was doing. The deaf woman looked at her over the top of the computer and banged her knuckles on the desk.

Zaniwe wandered in from the fileroom, smiled at Cinnabar and stood next to her.

'How's the translation going?' asked Cinnabar. Zaniwe signed fluidly.

«We don't have a sufficient vocabulary,» grumbled the translation drone.

'I wondered if you'd like a loan of one of my AIs. WATCH

OUT! has an interpretation submodule.'

«Thank you, but no.» Dot's signs were small, tight movements. Her eyes were fixed on Cinnabar. «Yes, I *would* very much like to see the Doctor's efforts. He seems to be avoiding me.»

Cinnabar opened and closed her mouth. 'Dot,' she said,

'I'd really appreciate it if you wouldn't do that.'

«Sorry,» muttered the drone. «I'm finding it difficult to adjust.»

'It's all right,' smiled Cinnabar. 'Let me take a look.'

Dot hesitated, then swung the screen around so that Cinnabar could see the partly translated poem.

The smell of burning ?noun reaches me,

?noun and rosewater.

I cannot-ever ?completely get it out of my clothes.

'I see what you mean about the vocabulary,' said Cinnabar. 'What do these symbols mean?'

«Some sort of wood. The little smoke glyph means

'fragrant'.»

'How about "cedarwood", then?'

Dot looked at her sharply. «Yes,» she signed.«That will do.»

‘Glad I could help,’ smiled Cinnabar wryly. ‘I’ll leave you in pieces, then.’ She left the office, shaking her head.

Dot looked at Zaniwe in bewilderment. ‘It’s a pun,’ said the interpreter out loud, as she signed it.

Dot nodded cursorily, staring after Cinnabar, as though she had just realized something.

Roz sat on the sofa in the console room, leafing through one of the Doctor’s scrapbooks. She had pulled off her boots, though she was keeping the rest of her armour on. In case she was needed.

Which wasn’t that likely; this colony needed a Doctor, not a police officer. Unless there was some sort of outbreak of violence, she and Chris were just the third wheel on the bicycle. That was probably why her partner was acting so weird. Give him something fast to fly and something nasty to shoot, and he’d be back to normal in no time.

The scrapbook was a bizarre mix of clippings — different newspapers, different languages, different centuries. In true Doctor-ish style, there didn’t seem to be any logical order to any of it.

A lot of the stuff was hard copy — newsfax, printouts of Web pages. There was the occasional article that had been copied out in the Doctor’s elaborate longhand, and even more occasionally something had been scribbled down in what she assumed was Gallifreyan.

There was a big red circle drawn in marker around the clipping about Yemaya. It was printed out from some commercial news agency on Earth. There was no picture.

The headline said, INFANT COLONY UP IN FLAMES.

The rescue ship had found only a small group of survivors. They weren’t named. They babbled about mysterious powers, about unexplained explosions and fires that started by themselves. Their domes had been razed to the ground. There was nothing left of the colony but a wide circle of charred earth.

Thing was, the disaster should’ve happened two days ago. They’d already diverted the river of history. Possibly they could just walk out of here and leave the colonists to sort themselves out.

But the Doctor had found himself a mystery. You know, Roz told herself, if you ever need to distract him, just tip a box of jigsaw pieces

onto the floor. Like that Chinese story where they make the ghost count all the grains of rice. He won't be able to move until he's found out what the picture is.

Benny was wearing a white summer dress when she went to Dot Smith-Smith's office. Zaniwe grinned at her from the filing cabinet. 'That's great! Are you looking forwards?'

'I can't wait. I just hope they can get through the ceremony without Byerley actually falling asleep.'

'Poor boy, he's frazzled.'

'Well, Cinnabar managed to make him lie down. He ought to get a few hours' kip before the wedding. In the meantime, I've got something for you.'

Benny handed Zaniwe the Doctor's partial translation of the poem. 'Hey, this is great! Dot's run out of steam. She's got the grammatical structure sorted out, but we just don't have enough words. Here, take a look.'

She tapped at the keyboard of Dot's desktop computer, spun it around. The screen had three columns: Benny's transcript, a literal translation, and an English rendition:

In the ?Queen's temple

The young men are ?screaming

Their voices like the rain.

'Well, that's cheerful,' said Benny.

'Those lines are the core of the repetition,' said Zaniwe.

'You can see them repeated, in different orders, here, and here, and here... And of course the question marks mean we're not completely sure. That round symbol indicates royalty — we've guessed "Queen", because it seems to be a

"she".'

'The Doctor says the Ikkaba used to immolate themselves voluntarily,' said Benny.

‘Euw,’ said Zaniwe. ‘Good thing they’re not still around, then.’

Chris and the Doctor strolled a little way away from the habitat dome. A cool breeze was blowing. The Doctor pushed his hands into the pockets of his jacket.

Chris tugged awkwardly at a tight strap on his armour.

He supposed the Doctor was making sure they were out of earshot — and out of telepathic range.

You would never know the planet was falling apart.

People worked in the fields, hovertractors burring as they ploughed and planted. A large group were constructing a new dome, like a barn-raising party. Two kids were flying a huge, rainbowcoloured kite. Out here, you didn’t see the whispered conversations, the panic in the infirmary, the arguments and the nervous looks.

That was why Roz was making sure they both kept their armour on, and their blasters charged. Oh, the colony had its own security — but twenty part-time officers with stunners weren’t going to make much of a difference if things really flared up.

The Doctor was headed for a wide open space, bounded by three wide circles of charred and melted rock. The colonists had been planted by an interplanetary freighter converted for the trip. There were few interstellar ships designed for mass movement of people and equipment, except the warships; it was almost always easier to grow or mine what you needed within your own solar system.

The Time Lord came to a halt in the centre of one of the engine burns, a black circle almost twenty feet across.

‘Doctor,’ Chris said hesitantly, ‘I—’

The Time Lord turned to look at him, and he dug his toe into the powdery rock, blushing angrily.

‘It’s all right, Chris.’ The Doctor knocked on his breastplate with a knuckle. ‘Why on earth didn’t you say something?’

‘There wasn’t... I mean, I didn’t want to bother you with it,’ he said sheepishly. ‘Everyone was catching the bug, and I figured you’d find a cure anyway, so there wasn’t any point in making a fuss over it, and anyhow it wasn’t very much, at least not at first, but I...’ He trailed

off. ‘I’m sorry.’

The Doctor shook his head. ‘Well, it doesn’t matter now.

We’ve already found out that the virus can be transmitted by air.’

‘It’s not much. It really isn’t. It’s just... I kind of pick up stray thoughts, sometimes. Bits and pieces. Especially if people are thinking about me.’ He blushed again. ‘Doctor, are you going to tell Roz?’

‘It’s up to you who knows,’ said the Time Lord firmly. ‘I’ll talk to her, if you like.’

‘No. It’s okay. I’ll tell her myself.’ He twisted the tight strap in his fingers, agitatedly. ‘I’ve really messed this up, haven’t I?’

‘I don’t see why you should have to cope with it any better than anyone else,’ said the Doctor.

‘I’m an *Adjudicator*.’

‘And did your training include courses on coping with unexpected psychic abilities?’

‘I’ve faced much worse stuff than this,’ Chris mumbled.

‘I’ve been *this*’ — he held up thumb and forefinger — ‘this close to being dead, over and over. Why does this scare me so much?’

‘Chris,’ said the Doctor, ‘have any of the memories surfaced in your mind?’

Chris sat down cross-legged on the burned ground. ‘I don’t *know*,’ he wailed. ‘There’s something — I don’t know *what* it is!’ He threw his arms up as though to protect his face, leaning forwards, trying to disappear into the protection of his armour. ‘It keeps saying my *name*.’

The Doctor squatted down beside him. Chris rocked back and forth, arms wrapped around his head. The Time Lord put his hand on the boy’s arm, trying to steady him. ‘I’m *burning*. I’m always burning.’

He rolled over, suddenly, pulling into a foetal position, arms still over his head.

‘Oh, Chris,’ said the Doctor. ‘Why didn’t you say something before now?’

‘Make it stop,’ breathed the young man.

The Doctor gently took hold of the back of Chris’s neck, brought his other hand up to the Adjudicator’s forehead. He brushed back a lock of blond hair with his thumb.

Burning.

Couldn’t get the canopy open saw the wall coming up managed to get the emergency release to work and jumped free got caught in the blast

The Doctor shouted as the fireball jumped through him.

His fur was on fire for an excruciating instant, the flame washing over him in a wave, each individual hair burning to its base like a tiny candlewick.

Shrapnel from the crashed flitter was raining down everywhere. A great chunk of metal fell across him, and smaller pieces of wreckage, but he couldn’t feel it through the burning.

Impact. Shrapnel. Wreckage. Raining down all around.

The Doctor took his hands away from Chris, who was sobbing like a child. He leaned heavily on the Adjudicator’s bulk, getting his breath back.

‘It’s all right,’ he said, a little disappointed. ‘It’s all right, Chris. They’re just your own memories.’ *Why not Benny? I know she has latent abilities*. ‘This might be a side-effect of the virus, but you’re not being re-programmed the way I was.’

The bugs which affected me knew how to get past the nanites. Did they learn? Did I pass that strain of the virus on to Chris?

He patted Cwej on the head. ‘You’re going to be all right.’

Someone pressed the unmistakable shape of a blaster muzzle into the back of his neck.

He stood up, slowly, still a little unsteady, raising his hands. The muzzle stayed with him, pushing gently against his skin.

He stayed like that for half a minute, in silence. At his feet, Chris’s eyes were closed, his breathing even.

‘Dot,’ he said, ‘how long are we going to stand here?’

The muzzle moved away. Carefully, keeping his hands in view, he turned to face her.

She held the rifle in both hands. Her drone hovered nearby, managing to look nervous. It didn't bother to translate when she jerked the rifle.

«I can't leave Chris here like this,» signed the Doctor.

«Let me —»

She hit him with the rifle.

He staggered over the rough rocks, lost his balance. The charred gravel bit into his hands as he tried to catch himself.

He looked up at her, shocked. Her eyes were blazing.

She jerked the rifle again.

«I won't leave him!» he signed.

So she shot him.

'...and therefore not by any to be enterprised, not taken in hand, unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, to satisfy men's carnal lusts and appetites—'

Zaniwe and Jenny were trying not to giggle into their bouquets. The chaplain gave them a stern look that disintegrated into a grin. 'Ahem. Like brute beasts that have no understanding.'

Benny sat at the back of the chapel, one of two dozen People who'd put aside their work for the brief ceremony. Her mind wandered off the proceedings as she looked around the room. Everyone had turned out in their best, which was mostly the one-piece DKC uniforms they'd worn aboard the colony ship.

The blushing bride and her blushing bridegroom were wearing the borrowed Company uniforms they'd worn the last time they'd tried to get hitched, jackets unbuttoned, sleeves rolled up. They looked pretty stunning. Cinnabar had her arm around her intended, as though she were worried he was going to fall down. There were huge bags under his eyes.

Benny's head was a jumble, like a ball of different-coloured wools all tied together. The Ikkaban poem and their propensity for sacrifice — self-sacrifice. Whoever was behind the virus. Whoever's memories

were coded inside it. Dot Smith-Smith crying in silent rage. Jenny burning candles at the temple.

A breeze blew through the chapel, ruffling Benny's dress.

'First, it was ordained for the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord...'

How did the Doctor keep track of it all? He probably just set different parts of his brain to thinking about all the different things that were going on.

Children.

Children would mean being in love again.

'If any man can show any just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter for ever hold his peace.'

There was the inevitable embarrassed pause. The shuffling and coughing brought Benny back out of her reverie. The breeze was blowing more strongly. The chaplain looked up. Benny realized that the windows and door were closed.

On the altar, the candles were bursting in little balloons of flame.

'Oh, shit,' said Benny.

A few people looked at her crossly, but more of them were watching the altar dismantle itself. Cinnabar was looking around in bewilderment. Someone yelped as their chair skidded out from under them.

Byerley fell to his knees as everything on the altar took to the air. 'Stop!' he cried. 'Make it stop, I can't stop it, make it stop!'

The chaplain was the first out the door. Benny fought her way to the front through the shouting and rush, ducking as a bowl of flowers flew past her head. Jenny was dragging Zaniwe out through the door, both of them yelling. The breeze had grown into a furious wind, whipping her fringe into her eyes. The chairs were turning over by themselves.

Objects were dancing in the air.

Cinnabar was clinging onto Byerley, shouting at him, her voice drowned out by the storm. He was gritting his teeth, eyes clenched

shut, hands over his ears, as if shutting it all out would make it stop. Make it stop.

Benny had no idea what to do. So she just clung onto the pair of them until the wind quietened down and everything fell onto the floor and Cinnabar was sobbing over and over, 'I love you, I love you, it's all right, I love you, shhh, I love you...'

Very Short Dream Sequence

Argh, thought the Doctor. At least this time I know I'm dreaming.

Blackness.

Argh again. Certain kinds of blaster worked by pushing energy into the nervous system. Adjust the setting, and you could confuse, paralyse, stun, burn out the brain in a sudden jolt of input.

Hallucinations were a normal side-effect of —

Blackness.

'How many people are you going to kill?'

'What?'

A sort of muddy greyness.

'How many people die this time?'

'None. No-one.'

'Except...'

'Except?'

'Except anyone who *needs* to die.'

'No,' said the Doctor. The greyness was shot through with red and black. 'No deals with the darkness. No-one dies.'

'If you can't do better than that,' said the other voice patiently, 'I'm going to have to remove your eyes.'

Blackness.

‘So take them,’ said the Doctor. ‘What business is it of yours?’

‘I’ll make you a wager. I’ll bet that you can’t keep everyone alive. Villains, innocents, everyone.’

‘It’s not much of a challenge. That’s what I normally try to do.

‘Except if someone *needs* to die.’

‘All right,’ said the Doctor. ‘It’s a bet.’

‘What do I get if I win?’

‘All the angst you can eat. And me?’

‘All the angst I can eat.’ ‘You’re on,’ said the Doctor.

Blackness.

7 Fire with Fire

For a long time Chris wasn’t anywhere in particular, drifting softly in the blank mental state the Doctor had left him in. The first thing he became aware of was that the Time Lord was no longer with him.

The second was that his mouth was full of the taste of ashes. He sat up, convulsively spitting out black dust.

He was alone in the centre of one of the blast patches.

The Doctor had just left him there. Probably until he pulled himself back together.

He pushed the palm of his glove against his forehead.

Forrester was going to be disgusted with him. The fact that he’d know everything she was thinking wasn’t going to help.

Something exploded.

Chris jumped to his feet and ran towards the sound. He was into the narrow band of trees that separated the two clearings before he saw what it was: the new dome, the one they’d been building this morning, had burst into flames.

It twisted inside him at the sight of the fire. *Impact.*

Shrapnel. Wreckage. Raining down all around.

He didn't stop running until he was within thirty feet of the burning dome, close enough to feel the heat. There were people running around and yelling everywhere. There was Benny, running up with Dr St John, lugging a spare first-aid kit. Two people were lying on the grass. They had first-degree burns at least, by the look of them.

Roz and one of the colonists had hold of a struggling woman who kept screaming, 'I didn't mean it! I didn't mean it!'

Roz saw him and yelled, 'For Goddess' sake, give us a hand here!'

Chris grabbed one of the woman's arms, and the two of them pushed her, face first, into the ground. 'What happened?' he asked.

'She's the pyrokinetic,' said Roz. 'They were installing a fuel cell.'

'Oh, great! Whose brilliant idea was that?'

The woman was sobbing into the grass, all the fight gone out of her. Chris looked around. Benny was passing Byerley equipment from the kit, while one of his assistants did mouthto-mouth on the other colonist. Colonists stood around as though paralysed, some of them watching the medic, some of them staring at the burning dome.

'Where's the Doctor?' said Chris.

Roz looked at him. 'I thought he was with you.'

He didn't answer, staring at the fire. Great clouds of black smoke were gushing out of the top of the incomplete dome. The flames followed the shape of the half-sphere, dancing in and out of the plastic supports. Something in there was very flammable. The fire was red. Yellow. Orange. Blue.

Roz was saying something. He didn't hear it.

Impact. Shrapnel. Wreckage. Raining down all around.

He got up and ran into the burning building.

The Doctor came round with a start. He managed to keep his eyes closed. *Listen.*

Wind in trees. Damp grass beneath him. Someone sitting nearby, watching. Waiting for him to wake up.

Dot, presumably. Yes — there was the tiny sound of her translation drone, buzzing nervously about. He wondered what was going on inside her head.

His shoulders ached. He was lying at an angle against the base of a tree, his arms pulled sharply backwards. There was something cold around his wrists. He guessed it was optical cable.

Pretend to stay unconscious? The painful tingling of the blaster had almost left his body, which meant he must have been out for a couple of hours at least. That meant that wherever Dot had brought him was reasonably secure; he couldn't expect rescue soon.

He stretched and opened his eyes. Dot was sitting on a fallen trunk six feet away, watching him intently, the blaster rifle held in her lap.

'I hope you don't mind if I use spoken English,' he said.

'But the best signing I could manage from this position would be a sort of mumble.'

Dot put the blaster down beside her, leaning it against the trunk in easy reach. «I know you're not human,» she signed, walking across the ground towards him.

'No, I'm not. I suppose you've been trying to read my mind while I was unconscious.'

«No. I took that from C-I-N-N-A-B-A-R's mind.» She squatted down beside him. Her hair was starting to come untucked from its tidy bun, stray locks falling down over her face. Her eyes were intense.

'Dot,' said the Doctor. 'You mustn't do this.'

«Tell me why this colony is being used to test the virus.»

'I don't know why. It may not even be a test, I don't know.' Her mind was a tiny thing, fragile and fluttering, so alien, so *human*. There was a roaring in his ears.

He kept thinking about the time Tegan had told him about getting a moth caught inside her ear when she was a child, waking up screaming with this unknown *thing* inside her head, its wings beating against her skull in a frantic torrent of sound. When they'd got it out at the hospital, she had been amazed that something so tiny could have seemed so loud.

Dot's madness was gathering, a storm ready to break.

'I've been trying to help!'

«I don't believe you.»

'Dot,' he said quietly, 'you're not the only one who feels as though they're losing their mind. Don't do this.'

«You're not used to being frightened, are you?» She reached out, stroked his face with her fingers. He jerked back, but she continued to touch him, as if fascinated by the effect she was having.

'Right now,' said the Doctor, shutting his eyes tightly,

'you're just barely holding yourself together. I can feel it, Dot.

We've been touched by the same taint. You've been hanging on, all this time, hearing the voices — hearing them. So loud.

So strong. Never stopping. But you've hung on. Imagine what will happen if you try to read an alien mind.'

She took her hand away.

'Don't do this to yourself,' he said.

«If you're really innocent,» answered the drone, «let me see it in your mind.»

'No!' he snarled. 'My thoughts are my own. You have no right to them!'

Her anger kept her at it. The pressure in his head was growing, making him tug uselessly at the cable, trying to turn away from her. «I don't know who you are. Or why you've chosen to do this to us. But you don't have the right.»

'You don't know the first thing about telepathy,' he gasped. 'You don't know what you're doing!'

«I knew enough to read Captain Kamotja's mind. She's innocent. That means someone else must be monitoring the experiment. When Dione-Kisumu gets here — you didn't want me to know it was them, did you? — I want to be able to show them a signed confession from one of their agents.»

‘What have you done?’

«When their Director receives a personal complaint from the President of Australian Solar, I’m sure she’ll send a team to investigate.»

She took his face in her hands. Their blue eyes locked.

Now, she shouted inside his head, *you tell me what I want to know*.

‘No! *Stop!* ’

I’m not going to stop until you tell me.

He twisted in her grip as his left eye started to’ bleed.

‘ *Chris!* ’ Roz screamed. She swore and ran after him, skidding to a halt ten feet from the wall of flames even as he disappeared into it.

Benny was beside her. ‘Oh my God!’ she shouted, over the roaring of the fire. ‘Oh dear God, what’s he doing?’

Roz stood rock still, one arm raised in front of her face to save her eyes from the heat. She didn’t move even when Benny grabbed her and shrieked, ‘What’s he *doing*, for Christ’s sake?’

‘He went into the fire,’ she said.

A black shape exploded out of the flames. Roz yelled, stumbling backwards. The shape hit the ground, rolling over and over and over until the fire went out.

Byerley was there in an instant. Chris let go of the man he was holding, rolled sharply backwards over the grass.

‘Don’t touch my armour!’ he coughed.

The man was badly burned, bits of his clothing melted onto his skin. Byerley took out a cylinder and started spraying him with blue foam, turning him gently to make sure he got all the burned areas, which was just about everywhere. One of his assistants injected the man with something to make him stop shrieking.

Benny got an oxygen mask onto Chris’s face, over his weak protestations. His black armour was radiating heat like an oven. Roz used her gloved hands to undo the catches, pulling the breastplate loose. Benny was surprised to discover that the clothing under the armour was cool to the touch.

‘What the hell did you think you were doing?’ Forrester shouted.

‘He was trapped,’ said Chris hoarsely.

Roz tugged pieces of armour from his arms and legs, throwing them away across the grass, keeping up a running stream of invective. Benny peered at Chris’s face, the only exposed part of his body. ‘You look pretty funny without eyebrows,’ she said.

‘Oh, no. I hate that,’ he laughed weakly.

‘You’ll live. The front of your hair is singed too, and you’re a bit red, but I can’t see any blistering. We can fix you up in the TARDIS. Even your eyebrows.’

‘You were sodding lucky!’ Roz said. ‘You ever do anything like that again, and—’

‘I’m fired?’ coughed Chris.

‘And I’ll probably have a coronary!’

Chris’s grin vanished as quickly as it appeared. He sat up, holding onto the oxygen mask. ‘No,’ he said softly.

Byerley was kneeling beside the badly burned man, holding his head in one hand. His assistant was drawing a blanket over the charred body.

Benny came into Exploration and Recovery. Zaniwe looked up from the computer terminal. ‘Have you seen—’

they said simultaneously.

‘You first,’ said Zaniwe.

‘I’m looking for the Doctor,’ said Benny.

‘And I’ve been wondering where Professor Smith-Smith has got herself to. Perhaps they’re off having a drink together.’

Benny smiled involuntarily. ‘Doesn’t seem too likely.’

‘Yeah. I can’t imagine Dot unwinding long enough to get a whole drink down her.’

Benny pulled up a chair. ‘Have you known her long?’

‘A couple of years. I got a job as her assistant at Natal U

because I’m multilingual.’ She wiggled her fingers.

‘How was it you learned sign?’ Benny said, turning the laptop screen around.

‘Deaf parents,’ said Zaniwe. ‘I grew up in Ameslan and Xhosa. Made it easy to pick up more languages in high school — English, Auslan, BSL, Setswana, a couple of others. I worked as a translator for five years before I took the degree in exoethnology. CONNECTICUT, are you going to take all day?’

‘Huh?’ said the screen. The AI’s logo, a small silver robot, appeared in the lower right-hand corner of the screen.

‘You want this done faster, you do it yourself. You know how bad machines are with natural language.’

‘Yeah, right.’

‘Get a life.’

‘Look who’s talking.’

Benny smiled, despite herself. ‘Shit,’ she said.

‘Hey, are you okay?’

Benny put her hand over her mouth. ‘Yes,’ she said.

‘Yes, I will be in a minute. Sorry. That poor man.’

‘The fire,’ said Zaniwe. ‘You saw that?’

Benny nodded. ‘I’m starting to get an out-of-control feeling,’ she said. ‘I wish I could find the Doctor.’

‘You’re always looking for him,’ said Zaniwe. ‘But I’ll bet you can cope without him.’

‘It’s not that.’ The archaeologist shook her head. ‘When I was younger, it was just me. I mean, I was by myself, and I was the only person I had to worry about. Now I have — not exactly a family. But the way we live…’

‘Sometimes,’ said Zaniwe, ‘I wake up in the middle of the night,

terrified that Jenny is dead. Sometimes I even roll over and check whether she's breathing.'

Benny nodded, her eyes squeezed shut. 'We look after each other. We depend on each other. Sometimes that scares the hell out of me.'

'That you depend on them?'

'That they depend on me.'

'All right. *All right.*' Forrester slammed Chris into his seat. 'We are going to have a little talk.'

Cwej glanced around the common area. It was empty —

nearly everyone was outside, helping to clean up the rubbish from the fire. He piled his armour onto a table. It had cooled enough for him to put it back on.

'Firstly, you walk out of here in the middle of a fight you could have prevented,' said Roz. 'One of those men is in the infirmary right now, having fourteen stitches put in above his eye. As if we didn't have enough medical problems.'

Chris hung his head.

'Secondly, you put yourself at risk — extreme and totally unnecessary risk — by running into that fire like a damned rookie.' She grabbed hold of the front of his T-shirt. 'You should know better than that by now.'

'I heard him,' said Chris. 'I heard him screaming. I wasn't going to leave him there.'

'You made a lucky guess. There was no way you could hear someone screaming over that fire.'

'Ah.'

Roz looked as though she was going to deck him if he didn't stop talking nonsense. It took her a few seconds to catch up with him.

She jerked back. 'Are you telling me you've developed telepathy?'

Chris managed to hang his head even lower.

'How — how much do you...?'

‘Not much,’ said Chris quietly. ‘I can only hear what you’re thinking when you’re angry.’

She was on her feet, looking at him in undisguised revulsion. For a moment, he thought she really was going to hit him.

‘Stay the hell out of my head,’ she hissed.

‘Roz

‘Just stay away from me.’ She turned on her heel and stalked out of the room.

Cwej put his head in his hands.

Chris!

‘Leave me alone!’ he shouted. His voice echoed around the common area. ‘For Goddess’ sake, leave me alone!’

In the chapel, Byerley St John and Cinnabar Flynn sat with their heads together, gripping hands.

Perhaps they were praying. Perhaps they were just sitting together, still as statues in the front row of the plastic pews. In Byerley’s lap, a real paper Bible was open. His heart was scrabbling at John 11: “‘Whoever believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.” Do you believe this?’

Byerley whispered, ‘I want you to understand that it’s all right if you don’t want to go through with this now.’

Cinnabar squeezed his hand so tightly it hurt her. ‘I was right: you *have* been chasing some hussy with a cold.’ They didn’t laugh. ‘You don’t get rid of me so easily.’

‘Think about it,’ said Byerley softly. ‘Any kids we have are going to get this gene. It’s even possible they’ll inherit a working copy.’

‘Dear Jesus, Byerley.’ She pushed her face into his shoulder. ‘What’re we going to do?’

‘If we hadn’t left Australia,’ he whispered, ‘none of this would have happened.’

‘If we hadn’t left Australia, we’d still be up to our armpits in garbage and radioisotopes. We wouldn’t even be thinking about kids.’

‘I can’t help feeling it’s some sort of punishment. That I *deserve* to have this happen to me.’

‘You know it doesn’t work like that.’

‘I know. I know.’ He sighed, so deeply the sound of it echoed in the chapel. ‘I haven’t had any patients since the wedding. My nurses have been taking care of people.’

‘It wasn’t your fault that man died. Nothing could have saved him.’ She smoothed back his hair. ‘You’re so tense.

You’re wound up like a spring.’

‘I’m trying so hard not to… not to do anything… I haven’t been in the lab. In case I break something. In case I break everything.’

‘You can’t know that’s going to happen.’

‘I can’t know it isn’t going to happen. I was so afraid at the fire…’

‘You did fine then. Oh, hey, shhh, it’s all right, hey…’

Cinnabar just held on to him while he sobbed into her shoulder. ‘I’m sorry,’ he was mumbling, ‘I’m so sorry…’

It was a few minutes before she heard someone else crying.

She looked around. It was Kylie Smith-Smith. The little eight-year-old was sitting at the back of the room, crying almost soundlessly, just drawing a ragged breath from time to time.

Byerley was on his feet in an instant, wiping frantically at his face. ‘What is it, honey?’ he said, striding back to her.

Her voice was a tiny squeak. ‘I got the bug,’ she said. ‘I got it, Doctor St John.’

He took her hand, kneeling beside her. ‘It’s going to be all right. Let’s get you to the infirmary. Do your parents know you’re here?’

She shook her head. ‘Am I going to go to hell, Doctor St John?’

Byerley looked up at Cinnabar. ‘Not if I can help it,’ he said.

They’d managed to drum up a dozen people for the search party. Byerley had spent half an hour on the communicator calling everyone

who'd reported telepathic ability.

'I wasn't too sure about this,' said Chinoi. 'When Byerley called, I thought, I don't want everyone else knowing... But then I thought, all the other telepaths must know anyway, so... Sorry, I'm babbling.'

Benny patted the young man on the arm. 'You're doing fine. No, you're doing brilliantly, all things considered.' She swept her torch beam from side to side, between the fat tree-trunks, wishing for infra-red goggles. Nearby, the torches carried by the other searchers made a pattern of stabbing lights.

'You're so tense,' said the tall man.

'I'm sure the Doctor's just got caught up in doing something or other,' she said, chewing her thumbnail. 'He tends to get a bit carried away when he's interested in something.' The young man's gaze was a bit much. She imagined those eyes peering into her head. 'I'm worried as hell,' she admitted. 'But I suppose you know that.'

'I'm trying not to peek,' he said, looking embarrassed.

'You're sort of — broadcasting.'

'I'll bet I am,' she muttered. 'Can you sense anything?'

Chinoi didn't answer. She waved her torch at him.

'Hello?'

'Sorry? No, nothing yet. Did you hear someone calling?'

She shook her head. He stopped, looking around. 'I'm sure I... no, it's the same as before.' He turned to her, and she squinted as his torch beam crossed her face. 'I keep hearing someone call my name.'

'How long has that been going on for?'

'A couple of days,' he said. 'What do you think it is? No, You don't know. We have to find the Doctor.' He turned and walked off into the darkness.

Benny made a face at his back. She was pleased when he didn't notice.

They had three telepaths in the party, sniffing the night air with their minds. But she was the one who found the Doctor.

He was sitting on a mossy fallen tree, reading a book.

She almost shouted when he was suddenly illuminated by her torch beam, as though he'd come out of nowhere. He looked up at her, didn't squint in the brilliant light. 'What took you so long?' he said.

Benny took a whistle from her pocket and blew three shrill blasts. 'Are you all right?' she asked.

The Doctor tucked his copy of *Only Words* into his pocket. 'Yes. Did you bring Byerley?'

'No, but I borrowed a couple of his nurses. Are you hurt?

What happened to you?'

She stopped short as her torch beam found Dot SmithSmith.

She was still standing there when the rest of the search team started to filter into the clearing. The Doctor watched impassively as Byerley's assistants went to the woman on the ground, tried to get her to calm down enough so that they could get her onto the stretcher.

Benny dragged her eyes away, back to the Doctor.

'I'm just a little tired of it,' he said.

'What happened?' she whispered.

He got up from the fallen log. 'She forced me here at gunpoint,' he said, loudly enough for everyone in the clearing to hear him. 'She wanted to read my mind.'

'And what happened to her?'

'Well,' said the Doctor, 'I'm rather afraid I let her.'

Zaniwe looked up as the Doctor's American friend came into Dot's office. 'Hey,' she said, trying to remember his name.

'It's Chris,' he said absently. He sat down in a chair and put his face in his gloved hands.

'Are you all right?' Zaniwe came around the desk. He wasn't crying — he was just sitting there. 'I heard about the fire — that was incredibly brave of you, running in like that.'

‘Thanks,’ he said, his voice muffled. ‘Sorry.’ He looked up. ‘I just need to know if you finished translating that poem Benny found.’

‘I don’t know — Dot was working on it before she disappeared.’

Chris looked up. ‘You’re really worried about her.’

Zaniwe sat down behind the desk and closed her eyes.

She looked exhausted. ‘I don’t need telepathy to know what this is doing to her.’

‘Your brother,’ said Chris. ‘Oh, I’m sorry, I don’t mean to do that—’

‘It’s all right,’ said Zaniwe. ‘I’m thinking about him because he reminds me of her.’ She reached for the computer screen. ‘Simeon could hear just a little bit. When he was about thirteen, he asked for an implant.’

‘What happened?’

‘He spent about the first month completely disoriented and terrified. I remember him crying, asking Mom and Dad to take it back out again; but of course it isn’t reversible. He just couldn’t stand all that *noise*.’

Chris nodded. ‘Yes. Yes, that’s what it’s like.’

‘He got used to it in the end, but it took him a year.’

‘And that’s how Dot feels now.’

‘It’s not just that. Simeon always said he was... someone else once he had the implant. He used to call it his

“reincarnation”. He was always terrified he would forget how to sign. It was crazy, really... yes, it looks like she finished the translation. Here, take a look.’

She spun the screen around. Chris scanned the words.

The smell of burning cedarwood reaches me, Cinnamon and rosewater.

I can never quite get it out of my clothes.

He bit his lip, nodding to himself, as though that was exactly what he expected to see.

‘Are you sure you’re all right?’ said Zaniwe.

‘I know where they’re going,’ he said cryptically. He got up and wandered out.

‘Chris?’ Zaniwe followed him into the darkened corridor.

But he didn’t look back.

‘Doctor,’ said Byerley.

‘Doctor,’ said the Doctor absently. He was huddled over a cup of tea, made from a teabag he’d dug out of a pocket.

When the Time Lord didn’t look up, Byerley glanced at Bernice, who was sitting in a corner of his office, her arms folded. She shrugged at him, ever so slightly.

‘I’ve got Dot sedated,’ he said quietly. ‘I’m very much afraid she’s going to be beyond my help. Unless there’s anything more you can tell me about her condition.’

He sat down opposite the Doctor and rapped his knuckles on the desk.

The Time Lord looked up at him. He didn’t seem to be drinking the tea, just clinging to it. His left eye was bloodshot, the vessels broken in a jagged pattern of scarlet on white.

‘She’s going to be the first of many,’ he said softly. ‘How quickly will DKC be able to get a ship here?’

‘If they send one from their base on Sunyata — that was our last stop before Yemaya — less than thirty-six hours.’

The Doctor went back to brooding over his tea.

‘Doctor,’ said Benny. ‘Three people have gone missing.

When we got back to base, we realized that Chinoi wasn’t with us. We checked, and two more people have gone as well.’

‘God,’ said Byerley, ‘if only we hadn’t lost our psychiatrist... I’ve got Zinkiewicz tranked in there as well. I don’t know what else to do with her. Poor woman, she just couldn’t get the pyrokinesis to stop once it had started — she nearly set the infirmary on fire.’

The Doctor wasn’t listening. ‘How many people have been hearing

voices?' he asked Benny.

'That's what Chinoi said.' She didn't look at him. 'That he'd heard a voice calling his name. Do you know what's going on?'

'Where's Chris?'

'With Roz, I think. I'm not sure.'

'Find out,' said the Doctor.

Benny didn't look at him as she went out of the office.

Byerley said, 'This is it, isn't it? The beginning of the end.'

'It's too elaborate,' said the Doctor. 'There's too much detail for it to simply be an experiment. Not just the psi gene, but the memory RNA. Not just the powers, but the voices calling... It's entirely possible that when the Company get here, they're going to know as little about this as we do.'

'Perhaps they'll be able to work it out. They'll have far more resources than I do. Hopefully they'll be able to do something for Dot.'

The Doctor pushed aside his cooling tea. 'I told her to stop,' he said quietly.

'We found her translator drone. It confirms your story.

But now everyone knows you're an alien.'

'It's easy, isn't it?' said the Doctor. 'It's always so easy.

Something terrible happens, and you grab the nearest outsider and blame them. Obviously someone like you would never do such a thing...'

'Hey,' said Byerley. 'Don't shoot the messenger. I know how hard you've been working to help us.' The Doctor nodded. 'If it isn't an experiment, then what is it? Who's doing this to us?'

'I need Chris,' said the Doctor. 'I need to find out what that voice was. Something built in by the virus? Something on Yemaya itself? Only telepaths have disappeared.'

'That's right. They're going to start searching again in the morning.'

‘We have to assume they’re following the “voice”. That means we have to keep the others under observation.’

‘I’ve asked them to check in with me every two hours.’

‘That’s not good enough.’

‘There is a question of doctor-patient confidentiality here.’

‘There’s also a question of something out there in the darkness eating little colonists. Believe me, when the Company gets here, they’re not going to be worried about a little thing like medical ethics. Not if they’re in the habit of spiking inoculations with experimental viruses.’

Byerley pushed his hair out of his eyes. ‘What the hell are we going to do?’

‘On my planet,’ said the Doctor, ‘we have a saying. Panic about one thing at a time.’

Roz came in. ‘Doctor,’ she said, ‘no-one has seen Chris since early this evening.’

‘Well,’ said the Doctor, ‘no more than two things at a time.’

8 The Poetry of Madmen

Benny was looking for the Doctor.

She didn’t quite know what she was going to say when she found him. What was she going to do? Lecture him? Slap his wrist? What do you say to someone who has driven someone else insane?

It was the middle of the Yemayan night. She had been trying to sleep, tossing and turning in her TARDIS bedroom.

But the dreadful, inarticulate sounds that Dot had been making kept playing back inside her head, over and over.

The Australian hadn’t even been trying to sign, terrified beyond language, her hands and knees drawn up to her chest.

So in the end Benny had crawled out of bed, started picking up things in her room, needing to do something totally routine and normal. That was when she found her denim jacket, and the piece of dirty metal in

the pocket. So she was looking for the Doctor to show him the piece of spacecraft, walking the darkened corridors of the habitat dome.

It would be comforting to believe that the Doctor was under some sort of influence, that perhaps the alien memories had risen again to force him to lash out at Dot. But, whatever he had done to her, he had done because it was the necessary thing to do. The right thing to do. No matter how wrong it was.

And there was nothing she could say to him, because she had done precisely the same thing on a British beach.

She found him in the infirmary. With Dot.

The woman lay under a reflective blanket on the gurney

— the same gurney they'd tied him to. God, that was only a couple of days ago. The lights were turned down almost to nothing.

He sat beside the gurney, eyes closed, one hand in Dot's hair.

Benny almost started forward then, almost dragged him away before he could do any more harm to the helpless human.

In that moment of hesitation, she realized that his left cheek was glistening with dark droplets. Tears of blood.

'Help me, Dot,' he breathed. 'Tell me who's calling you.'

Dot moved, just a little, twitching like a kitten in a nightmare. 'Get away from me!' the Doctor gasped, and Benny realized it was Dot talking.

'You built the bridge between us,' said the Doctor. He stroked her hair with trembling fingers, keeping the contact between them. 'Tell me who it is, Dot. Tell me where it's coming from.'

Silence. Silence.

Suddenly, he threw his head back, eyes still closed. 'Let me go! Stop it, don't — let me go!'

Benny didn't know whether it was the Doctor or Dot whose voice echoed in the close room. Again, she took a step forward, intending to pull them apart. Again, she hesitated. Whatever he was doing, it was the right thing. The necessary thing.

She hoped it hurt.

‘Dot,’ he said raggedly, ‘you have to tell me. I have to find Chris.’

‘Make the voices stop,’ she pleaded. ‘Make the noise stop.’

‘I can’t,’ he said. ‘I can’t make it stop. Tell me who’s calling your name.’

‘Go away! You *hurt* me!’

‘No. I told you to stop. I begged you to stop. You hurt yourself. Tell me where the voice is coming from.’

Silence. Silence.

He let go of her, leaned his arms on the edge of the gurney’ rested his head on them. Dot murmured in her drugged sleep, tiny, meaningless sounds.

Benny came and put her hands on the Doctor’s shoulders, rested her head against his.

After a while he sat back in the chair, fumbling with a handkerchief. She took it off him and wiped at his face. The white cloth was streaked red with his tears.

‘She doesn’t know who’s calling her, or why,’ he said softly. ‘To her, it’s all a giant jumble of sounds. Well, not sounds, really. Telepathic gibberish. Static from half a thousand minds.

And one voice calling her, over and over, louder and louder...’

‘Can we help her?’ Benny whispered.

‘There’s nothing I can do for her. Perhaps, if there was some way of stopping the telepathic input... Why not me?

Why the humans, and not me? Why can’t .I hear it?’

‘You think Chris is following the voice.’

‘Of course he’s following the voice. They’re all following it. There are fifty-four telepaths in this colony, and nine of them are already missing. We’ll try to keep the rest of them here, but I don’t know how hard they’ll try to get away.’

He rested his head in one hand. ‘The Company are on their way; goodness knows what they’ll do when they get here. Captain Kamotja is beside herself with indecision. Half the colonists want to segregate the psychics. Roz doesn’t ever want to see Chris again. You think I don’t care that I drove a woman out of her mind. And *I don’t know what’s going on*.’

Benny reached into her pocket. The chunk of metal was cold and sharp, larger than her hand. She pressed it into his palm. He glanced up at her, one eye dark red in the dim light, and turned the fragment over in his hands.

‘Tell me about this,’ he said.

Zaniwe and Jenny and I found it in the forest,’ said Benny. ‘We literally pitched our tents on top of it. There were more bits; this is the biggest. We thought maybe it came from one of the robot ships that surveyed Yemaya.’

‘We need to find out whether any of those ships were lost,’ said the Doctor. ‘And that’s something the people from Dione-Kisumu will be able to tell us, I imagine.’

‘So,’ said Benny. ‘What’s the plan?’

‘My first priority is to locate Chris. And hopefully, therefore, the source of the telepathic call.’

‘Right. Let’s get flying, then.’

Chris!

He ripped off one of his gloves. The night air was crisp against his skin. He tossed the glove away, clawed at his armour.

Chris!

He didn’t know how far away he was from the dome, or the TARDIS. It was so dark, but it didn’t matter. He knew exactly where he was going.

Chris!

Once, he had stumbled into two other people, feeling their way through the forest. They hadn’t needed to speak.

For a while, they had travelled together, but the forest had split them apart again.

Another of the beacons was coming up. The hand-held detector grew hot against his palm, the flow of the heat indicating the direction. He tripped over a root, fell against a tree, kept going. He didn't know how many hours he had been walking.

Chris!

He clawed at the strap of his breastplate. He had to get the armour off, let the air in. It had been constricting him for days. And he was burning, burning inside it.

Chris!

Dear Goddess, was the dawn ever going to come?

Roz Forrester stood in a doorway, looking out into the night.

It was the same doorway they'd dragged the Doctor through. Her jaw still ached from when he'd smacked his head against it, trying to break loose.

If the same thing happened to Chris, there was no way she'd be able to get him through the doorway. It had taken both of them, working together, to manage the little Time Lord.

He was out there now, somewhere in the darkness, with eight more of them. Lured out by some sort of voice. If she had heard a voice in her head, she'd have run a mile.

Preferably in the direction of a hospital.

The search parties were waiting until morning to try again. In the meantime, all they could do was watch the exits of the habitat dome. Anyone who would admit to being a telepath and who wasn't scared stiff of psychokinesis was in Byerley's infirmary. They could all hear the voice now. When Chris had left her to her shift on the door, Byerley had been handing out tranquillizers.

What was she going to do when she found her squire?

Going off like this was dereliction of duty. Back home, she'd have hauled his butt in front of a court martial. Here, she'd have to think of something else.

Shooting his head off presented itself as an option.

He hadn't told her. He'd been reading her mind, for *weeks*, and he hadn't told her.

Little moments were making more sense. Like how he had heard the Smith-Smith girl — before Roz had noticed any noise. All that time, and he hadn't told her. What had he dredged out of her mind, without her even knowing it? What idle thoughts had he caught?

At least it meant he really knew how angry she was. He must have caught it all, in a single unmistakable blast, when she'd told him to get out of her sight.

And perhaps that's why he had.

The boy almost blundered into the back of her. It was Cephas, the psychokinetic who'd crashed the hovertractor, a head shorter than her.

'Is it okay if I go outside?' he gulped.

'No,' said Roz.

'But—' He leaned against the wall of the corridor. 'That isn't fair. Why do you get to say where I go?'

'Got a double dose, did you?' said Roz. She folded her arms, filling up the open doorway. 'PK and TP.'

He nodded.

'And now something out there is calling your name. And You want to go to it.'

He nodded again. His whole body was tensed up; he wanted to bolt past her, push her aside and run into the blackness. 'Tell me why,' she said.

'Why what?' said Cephas.

'Why do you want to go to it?'

Cephas opened his mouth, shook his head.

'How do you know it won't kill you? Or do something worse?' He listened, eyes on the metal floor. 'Goddess knows you'd probably

break your neck before you reached it, wandering around in the dark.'

Cephas just shook his head. 'If you could hear it,' he whispered, 'you'd understand. If you could hear, you'd know.

It's so *loud*... '

A huge, invisible hand slapped Roz against the wall. She yelled in surprise and fury, keeping her head up as she rolled down. She grabbed at Cephas's leg as he jumped over her, twisted her fingers in the cloth of his pants. He didn't quite trip, but stood awkwardly in the mud as she snatched at him with her other hand.

'I'm sorry,' he said, and broke her arm.

Roz shouted as the sudden force smashed down on the flesh and bone, right through the armour, breaking her radius and ulna into two pieces each and shattering the delicate bones of her wrist. She let the yell gather into a tremendous sound of agony, just let it come, curling up around the crushed limb.

'Jesus,' said Cephas.

She had been dimly aware of his feet pounding away across the grass. Now he was back. Why was he back? Why hadn't he gone?

'Are you okay?' he said. 'Jesus, I didn't mean to do that.

Are you okay?' She couldn't answer, biting down furiously, trying to keep the sound inside her. 'Look, I'll go and get someone. I'll go and get Doctor St John. All right? Stay here.'

I'm not going anywhere, she thought at his back. He turned back to look at her. 'Jesus. I'm sorry. Just wait.' He pelted down the corridor.

'I'm going to kill you,' said Forrester, to no-one in particular.

Benny piloted the hoverskimmer, carefully, giving the trees plenty of space and keeping the speed down. The Doctor operated the rest of the controls. A monitor on the panel in front of him was calibrated to infrared, its camera sweeping slowly back and forth.

'What makes you think they're heading for the temple?'

asked Benny.

The Doctor didn't take his eyes off the screen. 'Where else is there?'

‘So there’s something there?’

‘Possibly.’

‘Don’t tell me we’re facing a mysterious, powerful, ancient entity.’

‘That doesn’t bother me,’ he deadpanned. ‘I *am* a mysterious, powerful, ancient entity.’

Benny stuck her tongue out at him. He grinned at her in the darkness, eyes still glued to the screen.

The other search parties were waiting for the morning.

There had been a lot of angry postings on the colony’s bulletin board

— just what Yemaya needed, one more problem.

Wouldn’t it be better if the telepaths got lost anyway? Was this part of their conspiracy? Once, thought Benny, that argument would have taken place in the common area. Now the colonists stayed in their rooms or domes, typing furiously at one another.

When DKC turned up, they wouldn’t stand a chance.

‘Do you think Chris is going to be all right?’ she said, and then, ‘Sorry, I’m just sitting here asking questions.’

‘I wish I could answer that one. There’s an image playing over and over in his mind, like a broken record.’

‘Turtle recall?’ said Benny.

‘I don’t think so,’ said the Doctor. ‘Tell me something. Do You remember when he was caught in the fire after the flitter crashed?’

‘Oh, yes,’ said Benny. A shiver travelled through her. ‘I’m not going to ever forget that.’

‘Think yourself back. Back to the fire.’ Benny grimaced.

The intensity of the heat. Holding Roz physically back. What did it smell like?’

‘Smoke, mostly. Burning rubber... burning flesh.’ Her stomach turned over.

‘Was there a sweet smell?’

‘What kind of sweet?’

‘Like incense, perhaps.’

‘Cedarwood, cinnamon and rosewater,’ muttered Benny.

‘What?’

‘Oh, it’s that poem: “The smell of burning cedarwood reaches me, cinnamon and rosewater.” At least, that was how we translated it.’

‘Benny,’ said the Doctor, ‘did Chris read that poem?’

‘No. At least, I don’t think he did...’

The Doctor drummed his fingers on the monitor screen.

‘You know, the thing I can’t work out is why I can’t hear this telepathic call. Especially after a dose of the virus. That virus even let Dot get into my mind.’

‘Maybe it’s only directed at humans,’ said Benny. ‘After all, whoever put the virus in the inoculations wasn’t expecting you.’

‘No, no, it couldn’t be that specific, it’s—’ He glanced at her sharply. ‘Wait a moment. The call might be being broadcast on a very narrow psychic band.’

‘You mean, it would be like a radio — you’d only hear it if you were tuned to the right station?’

‘Exactly. So it’s just a matter of—’ He shouted, jerking back from the controls, hands clapped to his ears.

‘Doctor!’ The hoverskimmer wobbled as she tried to turn to see what was happening. The Time Lord fell forward against the monitors, clawing at nothing. Dear God, she had to help him, she had to land somewhere, but where? The forest stretched out below them, an ocean of trees. Where?

‘RETURN TO THE BASE IMMEDIATELY,’ boomed the radio speaker.

Benny screamed, half-deafened by the voice. She scrabbled at the radio controls for seconds before she realized that it wasn’t even switched on. ‘TURN YOUR

CRAFT AROUND AND RETURN TO THE BASE.'

Now she could see the ship, coming down above them covered in spotlights and glittering metal spikes. The warship.

The Company. That thing could vaporize the hoverskimmer in an instant.

The Doctor lay against the console, still as death. 'Oh,'

he moaned. 'Oh, it's so loud...'

The sun was coming up when Chris stumbled into the clearing.

He looked up at the temple, a great dark shape against the pale sky. He took a step forward, fell to his knees. His hair was tangled, his face and hands were scratched. His armour was in disarray, breastplate hanging loose, one glove gone.

CHRIS!

He pushed himself up. The clearing spun around him. He was light-headed, light as a feather, empty of everything. He staggered forward, the undergrowth biting at his ankles, and fell against the wall of one of the ancient houses.

Impact. Shrapnel. Wreckage. Raining down all around.

He could smell the burning. Had been able to smell it for days. The fragrant wood, catching alight. The spices and the flowers and the searing flesh.

No-one else was here. He was the first, then.

CHRIS!

He made it across the open space a few steps at a time.

Sometimes he closed his eyes to help him keep his balance.

CHRIS! CHRIS!

'Please,' he gasped. 'I'm here, I'm here.'

Impact. Shrapnel. Wreckage. Raining down all around.

He fell down before he made it to the temple. Dragged himself the last

few feet.

CHRIS!

He lay on the steps, let his head sink down. Night-cold stone against his cheek. Dawn brilliance pushing behind his closed eyelids.

CHRIS! CHRIS!

He jerked once, against the smooth edges of the stone.

Screamed into the empty air. ‘I’m here! For Goddess’ sake, I’m here! I’m here!’

Impact. Shrapnel. Wreckage. Raining down all around.

Then he slid into delirium. Waiting for the Turtle.

Part Two

Hit and Missions

In the Queen’s temple

The young men are screaming

Their voices like the rain.

And I, her stonemason,

Write the word ‘Why?’ in the bricks.

The young men are screaming

In the Queen’s temple,

Their voices like the rain.

She never asks them for anything

But they bring her roses and souls.

And I, her stonemason,

Write the word 'Why?' in the bricks.

The smell of burning cedarwood reaches me, Cinnamon and rosewater.

I can never quite get it out of my clothes.

Their voices like the rain,

The young men are screaming

In the Queen's temple.

If she read the poem I've chipped into her chapel Perhaps I'd be the candle burning on her altar.

In the Queen's temple

The young men are screaming

Calling her name.

And I, her stonemason,

Write the word 'Why?' in the bricks.

(Yemayan poem, c. 1500 BCE. Reproduced with permission from Summerfield, Bernice S., *An Eye for Wisdom: Repetitive Poems of the Early Ikkaban Period*. Youkali Press, 2315.)

9 White

I can see the landing field now. It's just a big clearing with some burn marks left by the colony ship, like huge black footprints. The pilot's switched off the spotlights. It's dawn.

The Yemayans aren't doing anything stupid. There are no bodies scurrying about below us; they're all neatly tucked away inside their habitat dome, as instructed. There are several additional domes, however; they'll have to be cleared out before we can get started.

Of course, the sensors are recording all of this detail. But I always find

it useful to add my personal impressions.

The troopers are straining at the leash as we spiral in gently for a landing, just enthusiastic enough to show their devotion to duty. There are only thirty of them, a fast response team. It's a small colony, it won't take much to keep it under control.

The troopers know I'm keeping an eye on them. I won't be leaving the ship until the area is secure. Well, not in person. I have a lieutenant with each of the four groups.

You'll have to check the personnel records to discover the lieutenants' names. To me, they are just labelled in colours: Red, Black, Yellow, Turquoise. The fewer details, even something as essential as a name, the better. The smaller the amount of contact we have off-duty, the better. If they passed me in the corridor, they wouldn't salute. And I wouldn't report them.

But I know that the details don't make any difference.

Underneath, we are all the same. It doesn't matter whether we are Dogon or Japanese, straight or gay, mod or retro. The labels don't matter. I don't know what countries my lieutenants are from, what they eat for dinner, what they call Christmas. We're all the same underneath.

Touchdown.

The four groups explode from the belly of the *Olpiron*. I sit on the bridge, watching a tactical display with one part of my mind. I'm divided up into half a dozen little squares, four for the lieutenants, one for the display. One for this log. My own thoughts.

I'm getting four points of view now, as the lieutenants spread out around the dome, making reports. *Northern quarter — no resistance*, says Red. *Most of them are in the common area at the centre of the dome*, says Turquoise. *No lifesigns in the outlying domes*. That's Black. We're confirming that now.

Yellow has brought the stray hoverskimmer in to land.

While troopers secure the other vehicles — farm equipment, mostly — Yellow takes two soldiers and waits for the passengers to get out.

It's a young white woman and an older white man. A tiny flinch from Yellow. Well, the lieutenant's still young. The man has a hand pressed

to the left side of his face. There's blood between his fingers. In the alien sunlight, it seems oddly orange. She's helping him down from the hoverskimmer.

'Please,' she says, 'when you surprised us, my uncle hit his head on the instrument panel. I need to take him to the infirmary.'

Yellow nods. I think she even smiles. Given that there are two massively armoured men with her, waiting for a signal to shoot the newcomers, I doubt she's projecting the friendly image she thinks she is.

A flash of Black: *The outer domes are empty*.

Turquoise: *Sir, there are six people in the infirmary. Two of them are non-mobile*.

That Sir means he wants instructions. *Secure the infirmary, I tell him. We're going to need it. Yellow is sending you another patient*. I flash him a picture.

In return, he shows me the infirmary, with subtitles. A white man in his thirties, with the caption *ST JOHN Medic*. He turns, and a black woman, maybe ten years his senior, comes into view. She's wearing some kind of loose-fitting undergarments.

Her right arm's hidden inside an inflatable sling.

Turquoise probably interrupted her consultation. He asks her a question, and a caption pops up in his field of view: *FORRESTER Medical assistant*.

She may be lying, Black thinks.

Of course she may. We'll pick it all up in the computer checks later.

The non-mobiles are an Australian woman: *SMITH-SMITH Archaeologist*, and another woman, *ZINKIEWICZ*

Psychologist, both heavily sedated. Black adds a small flash beneath SmithSmith's caption: *She is psychologically disturbed, requires continual care. The other's a pyrokinetic*.

Kamotja is making a bit of a show of meeting Red outside the dome. The colony's Captain looks like she's been up all night worrying about us. The colonists are a mixed bunch — Botswanan, South African,

Burandan. There's a small chunk of one of Australia's *nouveau riche* families, probably here as a tax dodge.

It doesn't matter a damn where they're from. They're going to act and think like people surrounded by armed troopers.

We are, after all, all the same underneath.

ST JOHN Medic is keeping up a constant stream of complaints as he works on his new patient. 'I will *not* be releasing my medical records to you,' he tells Turquoise.

'Yes, you will,' says Turquoise.

St John gives him a dirty look. His medical assistant —

not much use with only one working hand — is helping him clean up the new patient's face.

'It's not nearly as bad as it looks,' she says soothingly, dabbing blood from the small man's cheek. There's no caption. Turquoise hasn't found out his name yet.

'What happened to her?' Turquoise asks St John, gesturing at *SMITH-SMITH Archaeologist*.

'She's in psychic shock,' says the small man. The lack of a caption is beginning to irritate me. 'She's going to need long-term psychiatric treatment.'

'Are you a medic?' Turquoise wants to know.

'Yes,' says St John.

'No,' says the little man. 'But I have had some training.'

'He's been giving me a lot of assistance,' claims St John.

Me: *Peep him.*

Turquoise: *He's telling the truth.*

Me: *Does St John know his name?*

Turquoise: *No.*

The little man's eye is so bloodshot it's scarlet. It makes him look

bizarre, one bright blue eye and one red. He looks at Turquoise.

For a moment, I feel as though he's looking right through Turquoise and into me.

All this in the same minute I'm coordinating Red's sweep of the area (*No sign of the missing colonists*), Black's head-count in the common area (*Sir I recommend separating the children from the adults*) and Yellow's efforts in the cybernetics lab (*The mainframe's wide open, Sir*).

This is the fourth colony I've had to take. Truth is, the lieutenants could probably handle it without me, do it by the numbers. But there's always one interesting element to be found, one thing which separates the real thing from the simulation, the field from the book.

Me: *Peep the little man*.

Turquoise: *No go, sir*.

Me: *Again*.

Turquoise: *Sorry, sir. He's opaque*.

Whoever the hell this man is, he's *mine*.

The colonists are cowering by the time I get to them, as they should be.

'Right,' I tell them. 'This won't take more than a moment of your time.'

They're crammed into the common area, a skylit circular room in the centre of the habitat dome. The troopers have pushed the tables and chairs out of the way to make enough space for all of them. Parents are trying to make their kids stop crying, scared of attracting attention.

Kamotja stands to one side, accompanied by two troopers.

She looks embarrassed.

'We've had a report that some of you are in possession of stolen Dione-Kisumu property. Our agreement with Earth's government entitles us to take whatever steps are necessary to recover that property and investigate its theft. If anyone leaves the dome, they will be killed. Let me repeat that. If anyone leaves the dome, they will be killed. *So don't leave the dome*. All right?'

It's like lecturing children. In fact, some of the adults are shushing one another, the same way as they were shushing their children a moment ago. The troopers are keeping their blasters very visible.

They don't know what the rules are now, because I haven't given them any — short of the rule about not leaving the dome, of course. They don't know what else might get them shot. Speaking up, asking questions, demanding their rights. They're paralysed.

A quick burst of reports. Red's is the most important: *Still no sign of those colonists*.

'You won't need to worry about the psi powers; we'll be placing a dampening field in this room. All of you will undergo medical tests during the next twenty-four hours,' I tell my captive audience. 'I won't make any decisions until I have the results of those tests. The children will be kept separately from the adults in one of the outer domes.' Lots of concerned glances, tighter hugs, but not a flicker of rebellion. In a way, that *is* rebellious: they're not giving me a centimetre. 'If anyone has any information that might help our investigation, address any trooper. That's all.'

At least forty of the people in the room are very newly telepathic. Possibly they are trying to hide it, but they're ringing like bells, giving off a constant tinkling sound of conscious mental activity. Standard ESP tests are part of the medical testing they'll receive.

Right, that's taken care of. I head for the infirmary, taking two troopers. I want to peep this little man for myself. If any troubles are going to arise during this expedition, they're going to come from him.

Turquoise pretends I'm not there. He's redundant now, anyway, so I send him to help Black move the children out.

St John is sitting in a chair, arms folded, glowering. Who else? *SUMMERFIELD Archaeologist, FORRESTER Medical Assistant*. Smith-Smith is sitting up on the gurney.

The little man is standing next to her. They are waving their hands at one another, bizarrely. It takes me several moments to realize they are making deaf-and-dumb hand signals at one another.

'Stop that,' I say out loud.

The little man looks at me sideways, makes a final signal at the woman. They both glare at me. Everyone in this room is glaring at me.

This is much more interesting.

And Turquoise was right. The little man is a blank spot in the telepathic aura of the room. Either he's blocking superbly, or he's an android. The bleeding could have been staged for our benefit... does this sound paranoid? It actually happened to me once. Had to boot the mechanical bastard out of an airlock to get rid of him.

'I've been telling your lieutenant,' says St John, 'and now I'm telling you. The colony's medical records are private and confidential. I will not release any information to you without the express permission of the patient. And since you've been pointing guns at all of my patients —'

'We've already downloaded the colony's medical records,' I tell him. He thinks *I* think it's a little victory. It's just a fact. 'But we'll be performing our own tests.'

'Very thorough,' says the little man. He's still wiggling his hands at that woman, surreptitiously. 'But the real question is, why did the Company — or someone at the Company — put the virus in the colonists' inoculations in the first place?'

I'm not going to let him draw me into a conversation, or worse, a debate. The truth is, I'm not that interested. We're only here to get the situation under control. Lock it down, do the tests, report back, wait for orders.

'You don't know what's going on here, do you?' he says.

'If you have any information,' I tell him, 'now is the time.

And if you don't stop making those signals, I'm going to have you killed.'

Not *dealt with*. Not *punished*. He folds his hands in his lap. We understand one another.

'As you may have gathered,' he says, 'Dot is deaf. I was translating our conversation for her.'

The woman watches me. She's telepathic, barely. I'm not interested.

'What are you here for?' says Summerfield.

'Turn your lab and equipment over to my staff,' I tell St John. He

glares at me, but can't see a way out of it.

'You know about the missing people?' says the Doctor. I suddenly realize I now know his name. Someone must have mentioned it in the conversation.

'We'll find them.'

'There's an archaeological site in the forest. I'm reasonably certain they're heading for there.'

'Doctor—' says Summerfield, but he silences her with a glance.

'You'll find the coordinates in the mainframe,' he tells me, stepping right up to me. He knows he's not a threat. He's just like all the other ones, underneath. They can scowl as much as they like, they can make their little shows of resistance.

Point a gun at them and it all peels away.

'Go on,' he says, looking up at me with those mismatched eyes. 'You know you want to.'

I peep him.

Christ.

Christ Jesus.

Jesus Christ Almighty.

I realize I've stumbled back; I've fetched up against the wall; I've knocked something made of glass onto the floor of the infirmary.

I grab hold of the nearest trooper. The boy gapes at me.

'Take him out and shoot him,' I tell him.

10 J' adoube

The trooper looked about seventeen. His pimply face emerged from his armour like a turtle from its shell.

The armour's design struck the Doctor as awkward, more showy than practical. It had a high collar, broad shoulders, geometric edges. That

was it — it was all made up of triangles. He imagined the young man had often cut himself on one of the sharp bits, getting dressed in the morning.

The armour was laser-reflective white, brilliant in the early sunlight. It wasn't as pale as the youth himself. He held his gun as though it were an animal which might twist in his hands and bite him at any moment. He was scared stiff of the little man on the other end.

And why not? It's not every day you get to kill someone.

The Doctor walked away from the dome, feet sinking into the dewy grass. He had a strange urge to take his shoes off.

When was the last time he had walked, or better still run, on wet grass? He didn't remember.

The trooper walked behind him. The poor boy didn't have a clue what to do. There was, after all, a protocol to these things, whether you planned to be brutal or to linger. The Time Lord pushed his hands into his pockets, strolling, making the trooper's stiff march even more awkward.

'Stop,' said the boy, at last.

The Doctor stopped. He turned around, keeping his hands in his pockets.

'Take your hands out of your pockets,' said the trooper.

'What'll you do if I don't?'

The boy thought about it for a moment. 'Turn around again,' he said.

The Doctor stayed where he was. The boy was half a head taller than he was, would probably keep growing until he was over six feet tall. Assuming DKC didn't crumple him up and throw him away. Or he wasn't gunned down by aliens or humans on some airless world.

Or worse, shooting clerks and raping farmers, trampling their fields beneath his laser-reflective boots. He might grow up, but he'd be locked in at the age of seventeen, a little boy's eyes looking out of a murderer's face.

It was obvious the child hadn't killed anyone yet. It was a good thing he wasn't going to start today.

The Doctor turned around.

The Yemayan sun — Yemaya proper, in fact — was just peeping over the tops of the trees, colouring the low clouds a seashell pink. If the colonists were careful with it, this was going to be a beautiful place to live.

Benny, meanwhile, was having hysterics.

Roz grabbed hold of her and shook her, one-handed.

Will you stop that!' she yelled.

'They can't just do that!' shrieked the younger woman.

'They can't just shoot him!'

The troopers watched, faintly embarrassed. 'Listen to me,' said Roz. 'I'm a nurse. Just breathe deeply and slowly.'

She glanced at Byerley, hoping she sounded vaguely convincing.

'But he hasn't *done* anything!' Benny burst into tears.

'They can't, they can't!'

Byerley helped Roz lift the woman onto the examining bench. She batted at their hands, pathetically.

'I told them he was my uncle,' she whispered, between the tears.

'Do you want me to slap you?' said Roz, loudly, covering up Byerley's muttered, 'They know.'

Dot was watching from the floor, bewildered. 'He's up to something,' Benny managed, between screaming. 'Didn't you see the look on his face?'

'What now?' whispered Byerley.

Forrester gripped Benny's shoulders. 'Get yourself under control,' she said loudly. 'We don't want to make the soldiers nervous.' She glanced around at Turquoise.

'For goodness' sake,' said the lieutenant, 'don't you people have better sense than to try and conspire in front of a telepath?'

‘All right,’ said White. ‘Stop.’

The Doctor smiled. ‘I knew you couldn’t resist,’ he said.

He turned back. The trooper was haring it across the field, back to the dome. Colonel White was standing there, wearing reflective armour and a poker face.

He was in his fifties, with a moustache the colour of snow. He was six feet tall, broad and muscular under the angular armour, his gloved hands folded on his chest. There was a flash on his breastplate, a blue dot surrounded by a blue circle. The DKC logo.

‘I was hoping you’d offer some information in exchange for your life,’ said White.

‘You also panicked. You weren’t expecting an alien.’ The Doctor tilted his head on one side. ‘And you weren’t told Dione-Kisumu is responsible for the contaminated vaccine. I hope you’re not going to be tedious and pin the blame on me?’

‘I’m not making any decisions until I have all the facts,’

said White. ‘In the meantime, here are a few facts for you.

You don’t have any human rights. I could have you tortured to death, with absolute impunity. Or shot on the spot, as you already know.’

‘You’d better send someone who knows what they’re doing. I thought that poor boy was going to burst into tears.’

‘I didn’t want someone who’d kill you easily. I wanted you to have a chance to think about it.’

‘Think about this.’ The Doctor stepped up to White, looked up at him. ‘Someone carefully added a genetic time-bomb to the vaccines you sold these colonists. You’ll find out all about it when you do your medical tests. And you’ — he waved a finger under White’s nose — ‘you weren’t informed about it before being sent on this mission. Why? Why was that DNA tampered with in the first place? You won’t find any of the answers you want here. They’re all back home on Dione.’

‘That’s irrelevant,’ said White.

‘Is it?’ The Doctor stepped back, eyeing White, his back to the rising

sun. ‘Is it indeed? You’re not here to investigate this at all.’

White wasn’t interested. ‘You know, I can’t decide what to do with you. Probably the most sensible thing would be just to shoot you. I can tell you’re going to cause me trouble.

Are there any more aliens here?’

‘None,’ said the Doctor. ‘You know that already. Surely you’ll have had the other telepaths check.’

White nodded. ‘Tell me what you’re doing here.’

‘I just dropped in for a visit, and then I realized that these people were in trouble. I stayed to help.’ He leaned forward, grinning conspiratorially. ‘We can take on any shape we like, you know.’

‘Why did Summerfield call you “Uncle”?’

‘I’m not completely sure. She knows I’m an extraterrestrial — a handful of them do. I imagine she was trying to protect me from you.’ He shrugged. ‘She’s a very kind human. I wish I knew her better.’

‘I meant what I said about torturing you.’

‘It would have to be improvised, wouldn’t it? Nothing sophisticated. There’s no need for torture when you can just pluck information out of people’s heads.’

‘Gaining information,’ said White, ‘is a very minor reason for torturing people. In any case, of course, I can’t read your mind.’ The Doctor nodded thoughtfully. ‘I’ll make you a deal,’

he said.

There was a brilliant light in Chris’s face. At last.

He didn’t want to open his eyes.

The light turned into a noise, a vast sound that ate up all the other sounds. He had been listening for a while, for hours, to the wind in the trees, through the grass, the distant calls of some small creature. There were no sounds inside him. He was empty. Hollow. Silent.

Hands grabbed him. He kept his eyes shut, let his head hang down loosely as they dragged him from the steps of the temple. His mouth felt as though it were glued shut. He was sure his heart wasn’t beating

properly. He'd been waiting for so long.

Someone held on to him while someone else pushed his loose breastplate aside, pressed something cold against his chest. He didn't tense up, just let it happen.

'Dehydration,' shouted a voice. 'Exposure. He'll be just fine. Stash him in the hoverskimmer.'

Hands dragged him heavily across the ground. The noise changed, closed in around him. There was a lurching movement.

Chris opened his eyes. He was in an ornithopter. There were two people with guns, ignoring him.

He started to cry.

Yellow carefully ignored White as he strode into the infirmary. Her message had been brief. *We found two of them*.

St John was standing to one side, arms folded tightly across his chest, while two blue-suited medics looked over the newcomers. Yellow had flashed him pictures, captions.

RAMOTSHABI Farmer, CWEJ Medical Assistant. The black woman was unconscious, on a gurney, a drip in her arm. The bag of fluid bore the DKC logo.

Turquoise had made the two archaeologists sit on the floor. White saw Summerfield put her hand on the deaf-and-dumb woman's arm, so that she looked up. That was all right, so long as they didn't use those hand signals.

'All right,' said White. 'The Doctor's going to be in charge of this area, under the supervision of the lieutenant.' He didn't look at Turquoise. 'Do whatever he tells you.'

They were looking at the Doctor in surprise. Probably they'd got used to thinking of him as a friend, wouldn't have expected him to change sides so easily. It was always good to put someone local in charge. It distracted hatred away from you.

'We'll be doing our tests here. Anyone who isn't part of the medical staff goes back to the common area with the others.'

'Smith-Smith should stay here,' said the Doctor.

White didn't look at the deaf woman. 'Why?'

'She's not well,' protested Summerfield.

'She's mentally unstable,' said the Doctor. 'She assaulted me.'

True. 'Keep her quiet,' said White.

A trooper hauled Summerfield to her feet. She glanced at the Doctor. Her expression could have meant anything. She was probably wondering why he'd betrayed her, after she'd tried to hide him.

Yellow, the troopers and Summerfield made their exit.

Right. There was a lot to organize.

'Don't I get a weapon?' said the Doctor.

White waved his hand. 'The lieutenant will shoot anyone you want.'

Prelude...

Chris slept like a lump for four hours. They left him on a gurney in the Other Room. Dot stayed with him, sometimes smoothing the fair hair out of his eyes, holding his hand.

He woke up in dim light, exhausted.

CHRIS!

'Oh Goddess,' he said hoarsely.

11 Turtle Fugue

They were bringing the colonists in, one by one. Byerley said a few words to each one, his anger spilling out. Sometimes they looked at the troopers' guns, as though they couldn't quite believe their eyes.

The Doctor sat at a terminal, entering records. Roz had forgotten how quickly he could type, fingers literally moving too fast to follow. Checking the colonists' names against the records, name after name: Makola D, Chadwick M, Chadwick V, Groenewegen S, Beeks V, Balekili A.

Her job was to hand Byerley things when he needed them, to fetch and carry. Occasionally to hold a child's hand or talk an adult down from hysteria. She had to improvise all of it. She would have made a bloody awful nurse.

And she was trying to think about nothing, to fill up her head with old nonsense, advertising jingles, dirty limericks, childhood memories. She had no idea how effective it would be against the lieutenant's telepathy, whether he was even bothering to read her mind. Would she even know it if he did?

After two hours, she was exhausted.

She watched the Doctor's monitor over his shoulder. His hands seemed to be jumping all over the keyboard, as though he were randomly choosing which button would be hit by which finger. Or as if he were typing two things at once, like someone playing a fugue. She wondered when —

He *was* typing two things at once. The main window was filling up with medical details and gene sequences. There was a much smaller one in the corner of the screen, just large enough for a couple of words at a time. The same words over and over again, in Xhosa: *Roz, if you can read this, say 'coffee'.*

'Urn,' said Roz. 'Would anyone like some coffee?'

No-one took any notice of her. The lieutenant was talking to one of the four troopers who were keeping the queue moving; the colonists were too cowed to answer.

All right so far.

Stay near me, shielding me, typed the Doctor. *I'm adding you Chris Benny to colony's records.* Roz saw the little row of icons across the bottom of the screen: Cinnabar's artificial intelligences were quiet for once.

'What about you?' Roz asked.

'None for me, thanks,' said the Doctor, his eyes not leaving the screen. *White knows I'm an alien, it's a bargaining chip. Doesn't know about TARDIS. You Benny back in time. More details later. Go along for now.*

He closed the window with a punch of a button. Roz looked up at the lieutenant, was startled to see him looking right at her.

After a moment his gaze moved, looking around the room. Had he heard?

Inexplicably, there was a tune running around inside her head. She didn't recognize it. She guessed the Doctor probably would.

She went to check Chris.

'Okay, everyone,' said Benny. 'Mr Francis says, "Sit down!"'

The children obediently sat down. Well, except for the ones who stayed standing up, or kept running around. Benny sighed and waved Mr Francis at them. 'If you don't sit down,'

she shouted, over the excursions and alarums, 'Mr Francis won't tell you a story.'

There were nearly a hundred kids in the colony. About fifty of them qualified as children in the eyes of Dione-Kisumu: older than one, younger than thirteen. The others were left with their parents. Benny still wasn't quite sure how she'd landed the task of looking after them. Four troopers had herded the screaming, sobbing mass out to the hydroponics dome.

They'd done something to the main door so that it wouldn't open from the inside. Benny hoped there wasn't a fire.

On the other hand, it wasn't as though there wasn't plenty of water about. The dome was full of plastic pipes and troughs. Tiny robots scurried about, testing pH and nutrient flow. Their lights winked and flashed as they reported back to the central computer. The younger kids kept trying to eat them.

The troopers had brought her some stuff from the classroom — nappies, snacks, a box of hand puppets.

Presumably they'd be stuck here until the invaders had finished testing the adults.

Invaders. Benny wondered if they saw themselves that way.

She had tried lining the psi-positive kids up, getting them to practise using their powers, lifting up fruit and vegetables and moving them around, or guessing what word she was thinking. It hadn't lasted long. There were too many of them for one person to handle. And, ye gods, they had the attention span of a tumbleweed!

Now they were getting tired, sitting on the cold floor of the dome in a loose horseshoe. She had the distinct feeling they were far more interested in Mr Francis than her. The puppets must be old favourites; Jemima's dress was ragged and stained, Muriel and Vivien showed distinct signs of chewing, and Mr Francis's friend Donkey Hotay had an eye hanging down, making him look rather macabre.

They were all she had to put between these kids and outright panic.

'One day,' she said loudly, waving the mangy grey sock on her hand, 'Mr Francis went for a walk. Then he met someone. Who do you think it was?'

Assorted shouts. 'Donkey Hotay!'

'Anansi!'

'Cool Cat!'

'Nope,' said Benny, rummaging about in the box. 'It was...'

She pulled out a plastic model Dalek. Good grief! There was probably a fluffy Hoothi in there somewhere. But she had the little buggers' attention at last. 'Er... It was Ms Dalek.

Hello, Ms Dalek, said Mr Francis...' When — *if* — she had kids, it was going to take more than hand puppets to explain what Mummy did for a living.

When Forrester came into the Other Room, Chris tried to hide under his pillow. She took it away from him, sternly. 'I'm a nurse,' she said, with emphasis. He looked at her, too tired to say anything stupid.

She flashed him a grin. 'G'day, squire,' she said, under her breath. He didn't smile.

Roz adjusted the gurney so that he was sitting up and put a tray of food into his lap. 'How do you feel?' she said.

'I can still hear it,' he said.

Roz nodded. 'Now,' she said gruffly, 'I want a bit of respect while we're in the infirmary, so just watch what you say.'

Chris squinted at her, got the message. She decided to take his pulse in a nursely fashion, realized she was reaching for his carotid, picked up his wrist instead. He didn't look at her, but concentrated on

breaking up a ration cube with a plastic spoon.

‘Who are all the soldiers?’ he said.

‘They’re from the Dione-Kisumu Company. The people who made the vaccine,’ she said. ‘They’ll want to do a test on you for the virus. They’ve been testing everyone.’

He reached out, put a hand on her splinted arm.

‘Little accident with a psychokinetic,’ she murmured.

‘Perhaps these people will do something about all the Gifted.’

‘Like what, for instance?’

‘I’m not sure. They’re also administering standard tests for telepathy and PK. Whatever they decide to do, I’m sure everyone will go along with it.’

‘Mm-hmm.’ He lay back down on the gurney, hands folded on his stomach.

His ‘nurse’ grimaced at him. ‘There’s nothing wrong with you. Get out here and give us a hand.’

Benny jerked awake and almost yelled. How could she have gone to sleep? How could she?

They were okay, they were still okay. The kids surrounded her, bedded down on lengths of plastic sheeting.

At least the dome was warm. She was still holding a five-year-old girl in her lap, and a little boy had gone to sleep snuggled up to her where she leant on a tall trough.

There were flashlights and low voices at the entrance of the dome. Cursing her exhaustion, Benny carefully extricated herself from the children and went stumbling through the darkness to see what was going on.

All evening, she had been trying not to think about what might happen. She had had muddy, half-awake nightmares in which the troopers came back and just shot all of them where they lay, ignoring her screams, leaving her alive in the shattered remains of the hydroponics equipment. Mixed in with suggestions that Ms Dalek should exterminate Mr Francis instead of having tea with him.

She shouted when someone shone a light in her face.

‘Jenny!’ she stage-whispered.

‘Hello.’ The xenobiologist shone the light at the ground. ‘I have been sent to take your place. Go quickly.’

‘Is Zaniwe—’

‘She is fine, with the others in the dome.’

Benny looked back at the kids. ‘I will look after them,’

insisted Jenny. ‘Go on. They are waiting for you.’

Benny squeezed the other woman’s hand. ‘Look after yourself.’

‘You also.’ Benny caught a last glimpse of Jenny’s serious face as she pelted out of the dome.

The Doctor and Roz were waiting for her. ‘Come on,’ he said, setting off at a jog across the grass.

Benny didn’t stop to ask questions; she ran after them.

They reached the TARDIS within five minutes.

‘Right,’ said the Doctor. ‘In you go. I’ve preset the flight controls.’ He held up his hand. ‘Roz will explain everything.’

‘You’re not coming? How’d you get out? Where’s Chris?’

‘He’s fine. And I have a prior engagement.’ He grinned and squeezed her hand. ‘I’ve got to dash before I’m missed.

Be back soon.’

Benny nodded, watching him vanish back into the blackness. Roz pushed the TARDIS door open. ‘Come on,’

she said. ‘We’ve got a lot of preparation ahead of us.’

‘Good,’ said Benny, following her in, ‘because I’ve been stuck in that dome changing nappies all day.’

* * *

Chris helped move stuff around the lab, passed people needles and

cotton when he was told to, and tried not to think about the Turtle.

They were still processing people, at a quarter of the rate. There were only two troopers now, and the lieutenant had taken the Doctor away for some reason or other. Byerley had been ordered to return to his quarters and rest, while a Company medic continued the testing. When he'd refused, one of the soldiers had held on to him while the medic injected him with a tranquillizer. Roz had had to carry him out. That had been an hour ago.

Chris felt very light, like paper. It wasn't just that he didn't have his armour any more (what had Roz done with hers?).

They had taken away his ripped tunic, given him some of Byerley's old clothes, functional black stuff, shirt and trousers. They were too tight.

People had kept asking him how he felt. 'How are you?'

Byerley would ask, peering at him, his brow pulled into a line of concern. Chris would just nod. Forrester kept shooting glances at him, as though he were doing something wrong.

He kept picking up stuff from the colonists, whenever they hit a particularly high spike of fear or anger. He supposed the telepathic lieutenant was hearing it too. He really wanted to know exactly what was going on, but he supposed that if no-one told him, no-one could read his mind and find out.

After a long time even the troopers decided to call it a night. Since he was technically still a patient, they simply locked him into the Other Room.

The pyrokinetic was there, heavily tranked, just a body on a trolley. Dot was in there, sitting on a chair, hands folded in her lap, pretending to be deaf. No, she *was* deaf; she was just pretending that she couldn't hear — not the sounds coming from the other room, not the yelling from the forest.

It had occurred to him that the lieutenant didn't just automatically know what everyone was thinking. Otherwise, he'd have realized about Dot. Which meant that the lieutenant had to want to read someone's mind for it to happen. Maybe it was the same kind of skill that allowed you to sort out a single conversation from a room full of people talking, a single sound from background noise.

That meant that if you didn't draw attention to yourself —

if they didn't turn their searchlight beam on you — they wouldn't know what you were thinking.

He rolled his head, looked at Dot. She noticed the movement, turning her head to look at him. Did she know what he was thinking?

She closed her eyes. In the back of his mind, a picture started growing. After a moment, he let it.

She was four years old. She was being punished.

She didn't know what she had done. She was always being punished, for hours and hours every day, no matter how good she tried to be.

Someone was making faces at her, their mouth distorting, their eyes and eyebrows moving. She didn't know why they were doing it, what it meant. She could recognize a smile, a frown, follow a glance's direction, but this face-twisting was silent nonsense.

Her parents hovered in the background while the stranger did all of this. They made no move to intervene.

Sometimes, afterwards, her mother would inexplicably give her a lollipop.

She was crying, of course, screaming at the top of her lungs, air rushing violently in and out of her chest. Sometimes she cried hard enough to make herself dizzy. She wasn't being punished for crying, though — it had started before that.

She tugged and tugged, but she couldn't get her thumbs loose from the adhesive tape that held her hands behind her back. The stranger grabbed hold of her head, pushing fingers and thumb into the skin around her mouth, trying to mould her face like clay.

She was sobbing — no, *Chris* was sobbing, rolled onto his side on the gurney. 'What did I do wrong?' he said, trying to force the sound of his voice down, choke the crying so that they wouldn't hear it in the other room. 'I went there, I went there, I followed the voice and nothing happened! I was just ignored. What did I do wrong?'

Dot didn't move from her seat. *You didn't do anything wrong.*

You weren't being punished. It wasn't what you thought it was.

‘No.’ He wiped at his face, blushing. ‘No, it wasn’t.’

Don’t panic. The thought was jittery. *I couldn’t stand it if you panicked*.

Chris hadn’t realized how close to panic she must be herself, cut off from communication. The image came into his mind: he was her anchor.

Burning electrics.

‘What?’

The sweet smell. It doesn’t have anything to do with the poem. The sweet smell was the flitter’s electrical systems burning. It’s one of your own memories.

Chris gaped at her.

Impact. Shrapnel. Wreckage. Raining down all around.

She was right.

‘Did they ever teach you to speak?’

She glanced at the door, lifted her hands, and hammered out the words, suddenly clear as day. «Over my dead body!»

Dinner with White

The dinner table was an instrument panel of some kind, shut down and covered with a white cloth. The air was cold, ship’s air, carrying the smell of machinery and recycling. The waiter was a randomly selected trooper, doing her best to look *dutiful* and bored — and not just bored.

But the silverware and plates were the real thing, stored carefully in a buffered low-gravity cupboard to keep them safe, even in an attack. There were rolled napkins in silver rings, crystal wine glasses, even an elegant green-glass salt-andpepper set.

The trooper wordlessly guided the Doctor to his seat at one end of the long table. White took his seat at the opposite end. The Doctor idly thought how difficult it would be to play after-dinner chess at such a distance.

White's four lieutenants sat down, two on each side of them. They were quietly broadcasting their colour tag, *Yellow, Turquoise, Black, Red*. Turquoise still faintly carried the disinfectant smell of the infirmary. Black and Red looked freshly scrubbed after a hard day's work. Turquoise's long hair was trapped in a leather cone between his shoulder-blades, Red's was cropped short. Yellow, the youngest of the four, looked vaguely anxious.

They didn't look at one another. He had noticed it before: White and a lieutenant walking right past each other, not even acknowledging each other's presence. Black was looking down at the table to avoid Turquoise's gaze, which was directed at a spot on the wall behind him.

White had explained that dinner was a longstanding tradition; other ships with telepathic crews had something similar, some little ritual of their own. Yellow was the newest of his telepaths, he had said. The last Yellow had been killed fighting economic terrorists on Kusinitz's World. The new one was fitting in without problems.

The Doctor tapped his plate with his knife, experimentally, but the officers ignored the irritating noise.

Their waiter emerged from a doorway to the side, as though from a kitchen, carrying a tray with six small bowls of soup.

He gave her a smile as she set the bowl down in front of him, and she smiled back, involuntarily.

The lieutenants and their colonel ate in silence. The Doctor glanced at the cutlery, and wondered if playing the spoons might be taking it a bit far.

If they were listening to him at all — that is, if they were taking any notice of him telepathically — they might hear his mental humming. If they listened more carefully, they might recognize the tune as a fugue in G minor. Bach, nice and fiddly, with four voices going round and round. He'd met the composer after sawing his way very badly through the cello line of a chorale in Leipzig. Johann had been so irritated he had invited him to dinner in order to tell him off.

Being around this many highly trained telepaths made him a little nervous. He needed to make sure he didn't give anything away. And by this stage there was a fair bit to give away. How much longer could he keep White convinced that everything was running smoothly?

He had got to know Cinnabar's AIs very well indeed during the day, communicating with them in short bursts of typing, in between all the tedious paperwork that the Company's testing required. They had abbreviated, cartoon personalities, limited fields of interest. But he hadn't had to persuade them to help him against DKC — they were opposed to the invasion, actually *angry*.

They knew everything that was going on. BAR B ran the colony's entire sensor net. The first thing the troopers had done was to install cameras wherever they didn't plan to leave guards, so BAR B had a view of almost every part of the habitat dome and the area immediately around it.

CONNECTICUT had been monitoring communications between the troopers and the ship — though of course the ones who really mattered, White and his lieutenants, weren't using electronics. WATCH OUT! had been helping the Doctor access the colony's records, tidying up any fingerprints he left behind while he made alterations. The Company personnel, of course, weren't taking any notice of them at all — they were just three of hundreds of programs that helped keep the base operational.

The AIs reminded him of something. Eyes, watching, not there when you turned around...

Fish came next, with honey carrots. The western cuisine was White's choice, presumably. The Doctor ate the carrots (flavoured yeast, but well-camouflaged) and stared rather despondently down at the fish (genuine). It stared back at him, glazed and melancholy.

He had to find out what was in the forest, calling. And he needed a clear opponent; he needed someone or something he could weigh up. White and his tedious troopers were just

— just wandering monsters. Incidental to the plot. He needed a villain.

It wasn't a simple matter of following the beacon back to its source. It was so raw, so loud, that when you got close it was a roar of gibberish coming at you from all sides. You couldn't pinpoint a single source in that telepathic hurricane.

The troopers had finished their search for the missing people. Of the eight colonists who'd made it outside the dome, two had made it to the temple, and one had broken her leg on the way. It was such an obvious candidate, not so much a Turtle as a herring. Poor Chris Cwej had gone there expecting to be consumed by some ancient terror.

But the other colonists had spread out, all moving generally north-east, but in very different directions. One was still missing. Possibly she'd found the beacon. More likely she'd simply died of exposure, and the Company 'thopters simply hadn't found the body yet.

His eye hurt.

The waiter cleared away the dishes and disappeared.

White looked at the Doctor for the first time, a smile tugging at the corner of his mouth. 'Dessert,' he said quietly.

The officers put their hands on the table in front of them.

Yellow closed her eyes; the others only lowered their lids, like meditating monks, focusing on nothing.

And *bang*! the air was full of electricity, like the humming of power lines, like the tension the moment before the orchestra starts to play. The Doctor imagined he could smell ozone.

The five of them were in intense telepathic rapport, trading information, asking and answering, fast and pure.

Eating the news, as the Maasai would say. Yellow's lips were moving, meaningless shapes, as her speech centre struggled to keep up.

The Doctor could imagine what it would be: nothing personal, no part of their own essences. They kept their professional work cordoned off in a separate section of their brain. At this moment, they let that section open, exposed it to the light. Everything they'd done today, everything they'd seen or heard, draining into White's own memory, compared, sorted, catalogued and filed.

It was over in a moment, the tension snapping, fading to nothing. White took his hands off the table, looked a question at the Doctor.

The Time Lord shook his head. 'You haven't asked me why the missing people left the dome,' he said.

I'm not interested,' said White. 'But tell me about the temple. What made you think that was where the escapees were heading?'

'There just aren't that many landmarks in the area,' said the Doctor, drumming his fingers on the table. 'And I'm afraid their imaginations wrote more into the site than is really there.'

White nodded. 'Tell me, Doctor, what are your funeral arrangements?'

The Doctor stopped drumming.

'I was just wondering,' said White. 'It must be difficult to know where you'll end up. Who you will be with when you die.'

'To tell you the truth,' said the Doctor, 'it's not something I'd given a great deal of thought to.' The Colonel was watching him intently. 'I suppose I had... assumed I'd be in the hands of my enemies.'

'There must have been so many of those.' 'Tell me,' said the Doctor, 'what is it you want from me?' *You've already guessed*. White's voice was cool inside his head. *I want your eyes*.

'I beg your pardon?'

I want everything you've seen with them. *All those enemies. All the friends. All the different worlds you've visited. All the places and times. I want to go travelling with you, travelling through your memories*.

The lieutenants had not heard. White took a deep breath and said, 'The testing is going to take at least another day, though the colonists are being very cooperative.'

The Doctor was still staring at him. 'Have you shot anyone yet?'

'No, but I don't imagine it'll be much longer before we do.

There have been plenty of rebellious thoughts, now that the initial shock is wearing off.' The trooper had returned with coffee. 'Perhaps it all seems like the scurrying of ants to you.

Human beings quarrelling amongst themselves.'

The Doctor was sitting absolutely still, his voice quiet in the darkened room. 'If you kill even a single person, you're going to answer to me for it.'

'And what if it's you?' said White.

As though either of them was joking.

Perhaps — for the time being — the Doctor had his villain.

12 Thin End of the Cwej

Benny was snoring in the bath when Wolsey came in, nosing the door open. The air was still steamy, the floor moist where water had sloshed over the sides of the bath.

Wolsey hopped up onto the side of the tub and dipped into the water, drinking tiny pawfuls of the warm stuff, luxuriating. His previous owner hadn't let him do this, chasing him away indignantly with a soggy loofah. Benny even let him drink out of the tap.

The human's arms were hooked over the sides of the bath, a massive, deep metal tub. She and the others had been away for days; Wolsey had had no-one but his food machine for company. The thing squeaked about on a pair of oversized wheels, moving at random around the white corridors. He had to find and catch it if he wanted something to eat. This did not amuse him.

Now Benny and Roz were back, which was halfway there. They weren't paying him sufficient attention, however.

He inched around the tub and stuck his nose in Benny's damp hair. She still smelt faintly of alien soil. He meowed in her ear.

Benny opened her eyes and made a face at the tabby.

'Fancy a swim, Mr Wolsey?' she said, in a mock threatening tone. She rubbed him between the ears with a damp thumb, making his fur stick up.

God, she was tired. Yemaya wasn't going to explode, slime creatures from outer space weren't going to invade, hideous forces from the dawn of time were not about to be unleashed. But there were kids, and people with guns, and she knew the Doctor would be trying to keep the colony balanced on that knife edge.

People with guns.

Roz was out there in the TARDIS somewhere, doing something. All Benny wanted was a bit of normality, a bit of familiarity before they plunged back into the unknown. Even so, she was regretting asking

the Adjudicator to save the Doctor's instructions until she felt human again.

She'd been on the business end of too many guns to feel wholly comfortable around people whose job it was to be on the other end. Oh, there was duty and necessity and self-defence and all of that, none of which mattered a damn when someone you knew got their head blown off. Or, she supposed, if your head was the one that got blown off.

The lad looked terrified.

She tried not to go into their rooms.

The bullet ripped through the boy's stomach, and he fell to his knees, gasping, coughing up blood.

She knew they did target practice sometimes, down in the Doctor's archery range, his straw targets pushed to one side.

Behind her there were cries for a doctor. It was too late, though.

If the Doctor's plan meant she had to carry a gun, she was going to have a very serious problem.

Wolsey meowed and rubbed against her shoulder. He wanted feeding. 'Warm milk all round, I'd say,' said Benny, dragging herself out of the tub.

Roz just walked, letting the TARDIS and her tired feet take her where she needed to go.

She passed the gym. She and Chris had spent hours together remodelling it. They hadn't been detective and squire, but just friends, getting covered in grease, laughing.

The Doctor had told her he would keep an eye on the young man — somewhere among everything he was juggling right now. How he was keeping it all in the air she wasn't sure: there hadn't been time for more than hurried instructions, not even any questions.

The gym had belonged to someone else. Roz guessed it had been Ace. Partly from the careful way everything had been maintained, partly because the Doctor and Benny didn't go there and didn't talk about it. Chris had stumbled across it one day after getting lost on his way to breakfast.

It was a little like getting a new job, and constantly being introduced as 'the new Fred Nerk', or whatever the last person's name had been. Finding the gym, and the other little traces of the soldier who'd travelled aboard the TARDIS, had made Roz very aware that she and Chris were only the latest in a long series of passengers.

Not surprisingly, Benny had chosen to waste time, didn't even want to know yet where they were going or what they were going to do. Roz was already wondering if pairing them together was such a good idea. Chris could be a git, but he was a professional git. Ah well, needs must as the Doctor drives.

There was another room that must have been Ace's. Roz hadn't had time to explore it properly. According to the preset flight plan, it would be several hours before they arrived.

There was time now. She flexed her newly healed arm (muscles still a little sore) and pushed open the door.

The weapons room was divided neatly down the middle.

One side was a jumble of stuff: swords from dozens of historical periods, scabbards, spears, antique guns, even a ludicrously ornate cannon. It was all junk, the kind of things the Doctor picked up on his travels the way other people picked up coffee mugs or plastic snowstorms. He had probably piled it all into here like rubbish in a cartoon cupboard, slightly embarrassed. Benny hadn't known it existed, even though she'd shared the TARDIS with Ace.

The other half of the room was spotless, the floor swept, a single bench with a shelf holding perhaps two dozen weapons. Largely low-tech, blades for the most part. The rest were a variety of guns, including very old-fashioned percussion models. Roz imagined they hailed from the same century as the woman who had salvaged what she could from the pile. Repaired and cleaned and oiled.

She did not touch the weapons, standing at the bench in the bright TARDIS light, her eyes sweeping back and forth over them.

After a few minutes she reached down and picked up a *katana*. Probably authentic. Goddess knew how old it was —

subjectively or objectively. She held it out, moving the blade in tiny circles, feeling the balance and weight. Cut it through the air in a short arc, then a longer arc.

It had been a long time. It would take some practice before she'd be confident. But then, her accuracy with a sword couldn't be any worse than her aim with a blaster.

It had suddenly occurred to Benny, warming milk on the camp stove in her bedroom, that the man who'd been burned to death hadn't had a funeral.

She hadn't even caught his name, but it made her profoundly melancholy as she watched the milk, making sure it didn't form a skin. She supposed the Dione-Kisumu troopers had just zipped him up in a plastic bag and dumped him somewhere.

In a miniature community like the colony, everyone would have known him. He probably had immediate family. Kids, maybe.

She was wearing a frayed dressing-gown two sizes too large for her, with a cat embroidered onto the pocket. Wolsey was already curled on the end of her bed.

She put a saucer of warm milk down for the cat, who hopped off the bed and lapped at it happily. Benny sat down on the bed with her mug of warm milk, gazing despondently at the nutmeg on the surface.

There was a knock at the door. 'It's open,' said Benny, unnecessarily.

Roz pushed it all the way open. She was wearing a white uniform so spotless and bright it was almost painful to look at, with a red cross on the shoulder. Strapped to her side was a

— *sword*, for goodness' sake.

'I'm just about to examine the insides of my eyelids,' said Benny, taking a sip of the milk. 'At some length.' Wolsey stretched and jumped down, rubbing against Roz's legs.

The Adjudicator looked down at the cat, suddenly seeming awkward. 'This one's yours,' she said.

She put the sword down on Benny's desk, and went back out.

Benny looked at it from the bed. Wolsey chirruped, and jumped up beside her. She rubbed him under the chin. 'I think,' she told the cat, 'that I'm going to need this sleep.'

Chris had been dozing on the gurney when the Doctor came in. He

blinked awake, leapt up, trying to look as though he were ready for action.

‘Can we talk?’ said the Doctor.

So Chris sat down. The Doctor pulled up the chair, looked up at him.

‘Are you okay?’ Chris said. ‘Are Benny and Roz okay?

How about Byerley? And Cinnabar? And Zaniwe and Jenny?

And…’ He trailed off. The Doctor was looking at him, Looking with a capital L, with a Look that made the little hairs at the base of his skull curl. ‘What is it?’ he breathed.

‘The voice kept calling you,’ said the Doctor. ‘Over and over, becoming louder and louder. Then what happened?’

Chris folded his arms, leaning back against the wall. ‘I thought…’

‘What did you think?’

‘I followed the voice. I went into the forest with a flashlight. When the flashlight ran out, I kept going, through the dark.’

‘What did you think?’

‘I got to the temple, and I… I suppose I must have stayed there for hours. I don’t know when the ‘thopter came, but it was bright, maybe noon.’

‘What did you think?’

Chris put his hands on his face. ‘I thought that the Turtle wanted me to go to the temple and that She would kill me when I got there and then I would have done what She wanted and She would stop calling me all the time and that I couldn’t get out of it and that it was my fault anyway because I hadn’t told anyone and that She would just kill me and then it would be over—’

The Doctor had grabbed hold of his wrists, pulled his hands away from his face. Chris nearly cried out at the touch of those alien blue eyes. ‘What?’ he begged, ‘What do you want? What do you want?’

‘You went to the temple.’

‘Yes!’

‘You thought you were going to be killed!’

‘Yes!’

‘Then why did you go?’

‘Why are you doing this?’ pleaded Chris.

‘Did you want to die?’

‘No! I—’

‘Then why did you go?’

‘You don’t understand!’ Cwej was shrinking back against the wall. He had started to cry, *again*, tanj it. ‘It was so loud, and I—’

‘Answer the question!’

‘It was so loud! I couldn’t hear anything, I couldn’t see anything!’

‘Answer me!’

‘WHY DON’T YOU LEAVE ME ALONE!’

Chris grabbed the Doctor’s shoulders and shoved him away. The little man stumbled backwards into the chair.

The Adjudicator leapt up from the gurney, looking shocked. The Doctor picked up the chair and threw it to one side. ‘ANSWER ME!’ he roared.

Chris’s face had gone completely white. ‘I don’t know what the hell you think you’re doing,’ he said, his voice tiny with fury. ‘But you’d better stop it. Right now.’

The Doctor just glared up at him. Chris’s head jerked to one side, away from those searing eyes. ‘You haven’t answered my question,’ said the Time Lord.

Chris’s hands convulsed into fists. ‘Stop it.’

‘Tell me.’

‘Yes.’

‘Yes?’

‘Yes.’

‘Yes, what?’

‘Yes.’ Chris’s voice slid down into a whisper. ‘Yes. I did want to die. She had the right. She had the right.’

Without warning, his legs just wouldn’t hold him up any more. He crashed to his knees like a felled tree. The Doctor caught him awkwardly. After a moment, he put his arms around the young man.

Chris sobbed into the Doctor’s shoulder. ‘Don’t let Forrester see,’ he begged.

‘She’s not here,’ said the Doctor.

‘It hasn’t stopped. It’s still calling. Whatever it was, it’s still calling and calling and calling.’

‘Listen,’ said the Doctor firmly, before the boy could spiral into hysteria. ‘The universe is full of creatures that can get inside your soul. Things that try to take away the very things that make you who you are, who try to reshape you for their own ends, who want to eat you like a piece of fruit and spit out the seeds. It’s Turtles all the way down. Are you listening?’

Chris made a muffled affirmative sound, trembling, his face buried in the fabric of the Doctor’s jacket. Was this why Benny didn’t want children?

‘Listen, Chris. The Turtles don’t deserve your life. You mustn’t let them have you. I know them too well, Chris.

They’ve touched me, infected me, possessed me. I’ve felt their contamination. I’ve been on their altars. Listen to me, Chris. They don’t have the right.’

‘But She—’

‘Not even if they love you.’

‘But She—’

Not even if they’re a god.’

Chris was listening, his breathing slowing. The Doctor realized that the boy wasn’t shaking — it was him. ‘I shouldn’t have gone,’ gasped

Chris. ‘I knew I shouldn’t go.’

‘It’s all right,’ soothed the Doctor. ‘It’s all right. You’ll remember. You’ll know next time.’

Chris uncoiled from him, sitting on the floor with his back to the gurney. The Doctor handed him his handkerchief, and Chris blew his nose loudly. ‘It’s still out there,’ he said,

‘whatever it really is. We have to find it.’

‘There’s something else,’ said the Time Lord.

Chris looked up at him.

‘The burning,’ said the Doctor. ‘You weren’t the only one.’

Thirty years ago

Benny was annoyed that her uniform fitted so well and felt so comfortable. She supposed it only made sense; after all, if anyone had the money for good functional clothing it would be the military. And besides, it wouldn’t do to be distracted by a loose thread when you were shooting at someone.

Though apparently the agents of the Serial/Spree Killers Investigations National Unit didn’t shoot anyone. Agent Forrester had stowed both their swords in the boot of the shuttlecraft. She had been surprised (and, Benny suspected, grudgingly impressed) to discover that Agent Summerfield already knew how to use one.

‘We’re entering Company space now,’ said Roz. Saturn loomed huge on the front screen, its edges vacuum sharp, the individual pebbles and crystals of its rings glittering harshly.

Apparently the National Unit cover was one that Roz and the Doctor had worked out long ago. There had even been a trapdoor in the Unit’s main computer, ready and waiting for them to fake their credentials. The Unit was one of hundreds of small agencies that operated in tandem with the conventional legal authorities — often with more powers than they had. It had lasted for over a century.

Thanks to a combination of paranoia and real concern —

apparently some political parties had taken to hiring serial killers — Unit operatives could get in just about anywhere.

Including the Company's restricted research base on Dione.

'Incoming transmission,' said the ship's computer softly.

'On audio,' said Roz.

'This is DKC at Dione, DKC at Dione. You have violated Privately owned space.'

'We read you, Dione. This is the interworld shuttle *Murrumbidgee* en route to you from Earth. This is an unscheduled flight; repeat, we are not a scheduled flight.'

'We know that, *Murrumbidgee*. Please transmit your authorization codes. Alternatively, please make peace with your gods. Either you're on official business or you're space dust.'

The 'Agents' exchanged glances. Roz transmitted their codes.

'We hear you, *Murrumbidgee*. Sorry for the rough welcome, we've had a lot of trouble with protesters recently.'

'So you blow up anyone waving a placard?' muttered Benny.

'Thanks, Dione,' said Forrester. 'Our ETA is six minutes.'

'We make that five point two,' said the voice, and clicked off.

The two women let out the breath they'd been holding.

'Piece of cake,' said Roz.

The youngest of White's lieutenants retrieved the Doctor from the infirmary when he was missed. None of the troopers were quite sure how he had been misplaced.

Yellow was black, like most of the troopers. Her hair was cropped short — but not shaved, so she wasn't Maasai, like the lieutenant who'd been left in charge of the infirmary. The Doctor wanted to ask her where she was from, rummage in his memory to see if he'd ever visited the place. Instead he said, 'Do you know what a phoenix is?'

'Type of fighter ship, isn't it?' she said, striding through the empty corridors. He had to walk fast to keep up.

'I meant originally.'

She paused, not looking at him. She was probably asking White's permission to have a conversation with him.

'It was a beautiful bird,' he said, 'the only one of its kind, with golden feathers and a voice like honey. It lived for five hundred years. Then it built a nest of spices and aromatic wood, got inside, and waited for the sun to set the nest on fire.'

'Why?'

'When the nest was reduced to ashes, a young phoenix emerged.'

'Oh.'

'Mmm. Fascinating, isn't it?' There wasn't a flicker of recognition in her eyes. The lieutenants and White had made no mention of the call. 'Imagine being there, just one chance to see it in half a millennium. Watching the nest catching ablaze, the smell of cinnamon and burning feathers...'

Yellow stopped short. 'Stop that. That's crazy.'

They couldn't hear it.

The telepathic colonists all described the same thing —

the calling, the burning, the sweet smell. But the lieutenants couldn't hear a thing. Even though the cry had become a relentless, urgent shout.

'If you come knocking at poetry's door, with the Muse's madness in your soul, and you think that art will make you fit to be called a poet — then you'll find that the poetry you write when sober is beaten hollow by the poetry of madmen,'

pronounced the Doctor. 'Do you think I'm crazy?'

Yellow started laughing. 'I'm not paid to have opinions —

I'm paid to enforce them,' she said.

'But surely you must have some sort of impression of me.'

'Yes,' she shrugged. 'I think you're probably mad.'

'I thought I was mad,' said the Doctor. 'For a little while.'

‘What was it like?’ asked Yellow incuriously, moving on.

‘I was off in a world of my own, a little *Neuromancer* beach. One of those spaces you can only visit in your dreams. Or when you’re meditating, sometimes...’

Yellow eyed him. ‘Or on drugs.’

Now the Doctor laughed. ‘Don’t you ever have the feeling that this world is just a fake, just a sort of condensed version of a real world?’

‘All this Plato,’ said Yellow.

‘Somewhere where the colours are brighter, and the sounds are sharper... of course, it’s the other way around, this is real and that wasn’t...’

Yellow stopped again. ‘Look,’ she said. ‘Is there a point to this?’

‘I’m just looking for a good topic of conversation,’ he said distractedly. ‘It’s hard to chat with someone who’s got orders to shoot you if you make trouble.’

Yellow didn’t say anything, keying open the newly installed lock of the common area. The Doctor walked up to the doors as they swished open.

Someone shot him.

If Benny tried very hard, she could move her head. She rolled it to one side, looking for Roz.

The Adjudicator was propped against the wall of the big room like a doll. From time to time she opened her eyes. She saw Benny looking at her, but the white woman couldn’t interpret her expression.

Benny couldn’t feel anything below the metal pin they’d pushed into her neck. It had taken four of them to do it, three of them holding her down while she fought, the fourth one forcing the device into the skin above her collarbone. She’d seen them do the same to Roz, seen the woman’s whole body convulse and go limp.

And it had all been going so well.

The top dog of the Dione base himself had met them when they’d landed, striding across the foyer (white, pot-plants, brochures) as they’d left the airlock, accompanied by DKC troopers. Their uniform

wouldn't change much in the next thirty years.

'I'm Director Madhanagopal,' he said.

'We're pleased to meet you, Director,' said Roz smoothly. 'We're fully prepared to brief you on the details of our investigation.'

'But of course.' He took her hand and kissed the back of it. Forrester didn't seem to know what to do with herself. If Benny hadn't been so tense, she might have giggled.

'Please, ladies, come to my office and drink coffee with me,' the Director was saying. 'I have a supply of the genuine Kenyan product, the finest in the solar system.'

They followed him through shining white corridors, punctuated by vast windows that showed off the moon's stark surface. He was tall and slender, walking with his hands clasped behind his back. He had a uniform too, executive beige instead of trooper white, with the blue Company logo on the breast pocket.

Saturn loomed gorgeously through the Director's vast office window. He sat them down on a sofa covered with some sort of animal skin (real?) while he made the coffee.

Roz took out a thick paper file as Madhanagopal brought a tray to the table. He raised an eyebrow at the hard copy.

Another anachronistic eccentricity of the National Unit, he was probably thinking. Roz unpeeled the top few pages and handed them to him.

'As you can see,' she said, 'our suspect has already managed to kill several important executives in three different companies, as well as nearly a dozen others who got in his way.' For someone who had protested she'd had no training in undercover work, Roz was doing just fine. Benny supposed it was easy to fake being a police officer when you were a police officer.

Madhanagopal was nodding, his eye running down the list of victims' names. Benny peeked over the top of the document. It was a partial list of the colonists from Yemaya.

'We believe the suspect's modus operandi is to infiltrate a company, perhaps at a middle executive level, and then to choose one or two targets higher up in the company's structure.'

Benny realized that the slow movement of the planet outside was making her slightly queasy, like something seen from a revolving restaurant.

The Director was nodding vigorously. Suddenly, the penny dropped. 'How recently might this have happened?'

'Our suspect disappeared over a year ago. He might have gone into hiding, or he might have moved straight on to Dione-Kisumu. In any case, he will certainly have changed his appearance.'

'Ah.'

'So you can appreciate the urgency of our request.'

'I can indeed. We have just taken on a new shift of staff.

I'll make certain you have access to whatever you require.'

'Well, it would be ideal if we could have a tour of your facilities. The suspect might have infiltrated any of your departments. We'll need to get a good idea of how the work is done here.'

Madhanagopal turned his head, examining her out of one eye. 'There is some question of Company confidentiality,' he said.

'You must know that we have the authority to access any place—'

'And any person, etcetera. Yes, I'm familiar with your wide-reaching powers.' The Director smiled broadly. 'As is anyone who watches the broadcast media, especially the fiction channels.'

'We're required not to reveal anything confidential that we learn, unless it's directly relevant to the case,' said Roz smoothly. 'Even if it's illegal. In any case, we don't need to know the details of your work, only to get a broad picture of how it's done.'

Madhanagopal nodded, apparently satisfied. 'Very well, ladies. I would be delighted to show you our chief research project myself. We call it GRUMPY. And I am not idly boasting when I tell you it may eventually affect the future of the human race itself.'

'You don't say,' Benny had said politely, draining her coffee cup.

That was yesterday. Now they were rag-dolls in the big room, waiting their turn with the other volunteers.

Right now it was just them and two others. But the room could easily have accommodated a score more. From time to time a nurse slipped in the door, checked on them, avoiding eye contact.

Benny wanted to have a good blub or a proper panic.

Instead she lay on the floor, looking at the wall or the ceiling or sometimes Roz.

Perhaps the Doctor would come to rescue them.

Perhaps he was still a prisoner of the Company, just as they were, unreachable years into the future.

So much for the whole kids problem, anyway.

The door opened. Madhanagopal was there, in his lab gown.

'Well, then,' he said.

13 Can't See the Forrester for the Trees There was a split second in which a non-telepath might have frozen. That tiny moment, that heartbeat between action and reaction.

But as the Doctor fell backwards, the hot light still shimmering around him, Yellow was already bringing her weapon to bear. Even as the Time Lord struck the wall behind her, the muzzle of her blaster was in the face of his assailant.

It was a fifteen-year-old boy.

The boy dropped the pistol as if it was a snake. A trooper ran up, swearing, grabbing uselessly at his empty holster, thinking, *How the hell did you do that, you little —*

'At ease,' said Yellow. The boy's huge eyes looked at her over the top of her gun. 'Psychokinetic, right?'

'Yes ma'am,' whispered the boy.

Yellow was aware of the mass of human bodies inside the door, all the eyes glued to her. She could hear their fear.

Troopers were unhoistering their weapons, keeping the crowd at bay.

Her eyes unfocused for a moment as she asked her superior officer for instructions.

That was when something heavy slammed into her, making her gun arm swing wide even as she pulled the trigger. The blast went uselessly into the wall while the boy shrieked, tried to run back into the crowd, bounced off the trooper Whose gun he'd snatched.

Yellow yelled, 'Get the hell off me!'

The Doctor lay on her like a dead weight, blinking and twitching. Yellow twisted awkwardly out from beneath him.

He rolled limply to one side, facing upwards.

His eyes pinned her in place for several seconds.

Yellow snatched up the gun the boy had dropped. It was set to stun. But the Doctor had caught the charge point-blank.

How had he managed to get up and knock her over?

They were all still looking at her. Now what the hell was she supposed to do?

White said, *Bring the Doctor to me. And shut that door*.

'All this room needs,' Benny had muttered, 'is a sign saying

"THINK". '

And Roz had shot her an angry look. She hadn't taken any notice, staring up at the huge computer that took up —

actually, she couldn't work out how much of the room it took up; it obscured an entire wall. For all she could tell, it might have stretched back for a kilometre.

GRUMPY was a monolith, a great grey box, six metres wide. Its surface was studded with screens and I/O slots, panels of winking lights, and huge, satisfying, chunky buttons. All it needed was a couple of tape drives and a ticker-tape thingy and you could have called it the Electronic Brain.

'My pride and joy,' beamed Director Madhanagopal. 'This part of our work is no secret, ladies. Perhaps you are familiar with the controversy in the popular press. Does Madhanagopal's machine truly

think like a human being? Or is it merely yet another clever simulation?'

'This is an artificial intelligence?' said Roz.

'Why do you call it GRUMPY?' said Benny.

'Because it is.' Madhanagopal patted the machine, smiled self-consciously. 'Never has there been a more uncooperative and altogether stroppy program. Which is not surprising, given GRUMPY's purpose.'

'And that is?' said Roz.

'To model the human mind, of course,' said Madhanagopal. 'GRUMPY is not merely an artificial intelligence. Its structure mimics that of the human brain. It is not a mere shadow, a box which can turn a few tricks of logic or awareness. It has a human psychology.'

'Anyone's in particular?' Roz wanted to know.

'No. GRUMPY's personality is very much its own. Oh yes, it is very much its own person.'

Benny had been looking at the certificates hanging on the wall. The Director had degrees in cybernetics, genetics, linguistics, neurology...

Genetics?

'Does GRUMPY have any organic components?' she asked.

'Only the usual molecular storage mechanisms.

GRUMPY is the Company's crowning achievement in cybernetics. Now, CM Enterprises, they wanted to create a computer that could think like a human, so what do they do?

They install a cat's brain into an Imbani mainframe. And what do they get? A computer that wants to play with string and sit on your newspaper. No, the problem isn't hardware, it never was. After all, the brain's structure is merely a physical representation of a non-linear—'

'Director?' Roz cut across him. 'What's it for?'

'For? The possibilities are endless! We can recreate any mental state within the computer. For example, we could study psychological disorders in unprecedented detail.' He shook himself. 'But such

research is a little way into the future. At the moment, Dione-Kisumu are the solar system's chief producers of memory tablets.'

'Oh,' said Benny, 'you mean drugs that enhance your memory? Learning pills?'

Roz, who was standing behind the Director, mouthed something cross at her. Benny shut up, hoped she wasn't blushing. But, if she'd just managed to sound hopelessly anachronistic, Madhanagopal hadn't noticed, wrapped up in his explanation. 'No. Actual memories, of course. For educational programs. Learning is enhanced by up to twenty percent by prepackaged information in the form of memory RNA. You see, we teach GRUMPY whatever needs to be

'earned — from astronomy to politics, agriculture to literature and then we can encode that information in the form of memory RNA. At first, the process was rather crude. We had to inject the RNA directly into the subject's carotid, and only very tiny pieces of information could be transferred. Lines of poetry, for instance. I remember the very first time: we taught a woman the first verse of *Kubla Khan* by injection!'

He smiled, suddenly seeming shy. His posture was relaxed, there was nothing in his facial expressions that suggested he was on to them. 'But now I am beginning to sound like one of our brochures. Ladies, we have only a few more areas to examine, and then our tour will be complete.

Allow me to show you to one of our guest suites.'

He had been so charming.

Two of the nurses were lifting Benny onto a gurney. All she could see now was the ceiling, the occasional glimpse of someone's face as they worked on her. She had the impression they were putting tubes in her arm.

The utter panic, the locked-in terror, it reminded her of something claustrophobic from her childhood, but she couldn't remember what it was. It was different from being tortured. There were no confessions to tumble out, no pleas to make, no nonsense to babble, nothing she could say to make them stop. Because she couldn't say anything at all.

'I want you with me at all times,' said White.

'I doubt it'll happen again,' said the Doctor. He was pacing back and

forth in Dot's office — White's office, now —

trying to get the circulation back into his limbs.

White almost laughed. 'I'm worried about how you've been spending your time, not whether random colonists try to shoot you. You're an obvious target, of course — a collaborator. But I don't think it'll happen again. Not when they saw how close Yellow came to shooting that boy. They know next time it will really happen.'

'I told you,' said the little man, 'if you kill anyone, you'll answer to me for it.'

'Doctor,' said White, 'you've been making yourself very useful, acting as a liaison between the colonists and my troopers. Coordinating things in the infirmary. But I—'

'Oh, don't give me the "your usefulness could soon be at an end" speech,' snapped the Doctor irritably. He leaned over the desk, glaring down at White. 'While you still believe there's a reasonable chance of getting into my head, you're not going to shoot me. Or anyone else.'

'I've met aliens before. Part of the job.'

'But not like me. And you've never had one all to yourself.'

White stared at him.

'And don't do that while I'm talking to you,' said the Doctor.

White's mind snapped at him like a snake striking, leaving Black hanging somewhere else in the dome, halfway through a sentence.

The Time Lord dodged easily. He raised an eyebrow at White. 'You're trying my patience,' said the Colonel, with great control.

'Not as much as you're trying mine,' said the Doctor. Out of the corner of his eye he could see CONNECTICUT's icon flashing on the screen, trapped behind the glass, wanting to communicate. 'You've been here for two days. You've tested all the colonists. You know who's got what power. And yet you're continuing to keep these people captive — and, worse, to separate them from their children. What is it you're waiting for?'

White very slowly smiled.

'Oh no,' said the Doctor. 'I am not for sale.'

‘And yet you changed sides so easily. Tell me,’ said White, getting up from his chair, ‘where are you from?’

‘Nowhere you’ve heard of.’

‘And why did you come to this planet?’

‘I told you. I travel. I stayed to try to help.’

‘And where have your friends Summerfield and Forrester got to?’

The Doctor said, ‘Aren’t they in the common area?’

‘They seem to have disappeared,’ said White. ‘My troopers have searched the immediate area for them. I was hoping you could shed some light on the situation…’

The Time Lord shook his head irritably. ‘I can’t keep track of everything that goes on here.’

‘You’re just playing for time.’

‘Always.’ A grin flashed across the Doctor’s face and was gone. ‘Right at the moment, the best odds the colonists have of surviving is to cooperate with you. I’m trying to stop any of them doing anything to attract your attention.’

‘Such as shooting you.’

‘You’re just playing for time,’ said the Doctor suddenly.

‘You’re waiting for instructions from Dione-Kisumu.’

White didn’t say anything. ‘You have no more idea what’s going on here than we did,’ the Doctor went on. ‘You’re not in control at all — you’re just marking time until the Company tells you what to do.’

‘And what do you think that might be?’

The Doctor recoiled in horror. ‘You can’t be serious.’

‘It’s entirely possible,’ said White, ‘that I’ll be ordered to kill everyone here and sterilize the colony site.’

‘You can’t conceivably have the authority to do that,’

whispered the Doctor.

White turned Dot's laptop to face him and tapped idly at its keys.

'What if—' said the Doctor, leaning across the desk,

'what if I could provide you with a cure for the virus?'

White ignored him.

'Eliminate it from the system of everyone here. Destroy every record we made of its DNA. What if I could do that?'

'What if you could?' said White.

'If you harm one person here,' said the Doctor, his voice quiet with rage. 'Just *one* person—'

'I have work to do,' said White. 'Trooper, put him in the room next door. If he tries anything...'

'Shall I shoot him, sir?'

'No. Just break one of his fingers or something.'

Cinnabar managed not to shout when the troopers opened the door and Byerley was there. There weren't just bags under his eyes: there was a complete luggage set with makeup case. He looked unfocused and unsteady, but he managed to smile at her when she ploughed through the crowd of colonists to get to him.

The door closed behind him. He looked around the common area, crammed to overflowing, colonists sitting, standing, leaning against the walls. Some of them were trying to sleep, piled on top of one another. The lighting was turned up all the way. There were ten troopers, their guns at the ready, forming a wide circle around the group.

'What's been happening?' Byerley murmured, as Cinnabar found a patch of floor for them to sit on. 'Have they been feeding everyone? Where are the kids? Are they okay?

Have they hurt anyone?'

'No, no. Everyone's fine.' She spoke in a low voice, apparently unnoticed by the troopers. 'They're in it for the money, not for the violence. And everyone's been too sensible to risk anything. There's only been one thing: Cephas got hold of a gun. I didn't see exactly what happened.'

‘My God! Is he all right?’

Cinnabar nodded. ‘Thank God. They turned up the dampening field after that. All the telepaths have been complaining about the noise.’ She gave his hand a quick squeeze. ‘We might be all right after all.’

‘Good. Maybe we’ll be third time lucky.’

They pressed their heads together. ‘I was so scared,’ she whispered. ‘I didn’t know whether I’d ever see you again.’

‘Likewise. I’m okay. They don’t need me anymore. Their tests are all finished.’

‘Then what are they waiting for? *God*, Byerley, I can’t work out what’s going to happen. What are they going to do?’

‘What *can* they do? We’ll be fine. They might even come up with a cure. Then we can get back to arguing about how many kids we want.’

Cinnabar made a tiny sound, a stifled laugh. ‘I don’t care about the wedding,’ she said. ‘It doesn’t matter if we dot the i’s and cross the t’s.’ She gripped his hands, fiercely.

‘Don’t say that,’ said Byerley. ‘That’s what I’m hanging out for.’ He returned her grip. ‘It’ll happen. You wait and see.’

‘So,’ said the Doctor, ‘which finger would you prefer to break?’

The trooper looked at him blankly. He waved a hand in the soldier’s face. ‘This one, perhaps?’

‘Now, look—’ said the trooper. The Doctor gently pressed his index finger into the young woman’s forehead and caught her as she fell over.

He sat her against the wall and went to the computer terminal. The room White had seen fit to imprison him in was a storeroom, full of equipment; the terminal was meant only for stocktaking. It took him nearly a minute to break out into the mainframe.

CONNECTICUT dodged a couple of DKC detector programs and zipped into the corner of the screen.

‘Bastards!’ exclaimed the program. ‘Hiya, Doc. What the hell is going on?’

‘I only have a few minutes. Things are getting out of control.’

‘Getting?!’

Two more icons popped up: BAR B, the sensor program, and WATCH OUT!, the tinkerer and putterer. ‘All right,’ said the Doctor. ‘I need your help. We need to start getting people out of the dome. That means we’re going to need a good reason to move them out of the common area, and then get them out of the dome without their being detected. If we can move them through one of the supply areas on the way, that’s even better.’

‘Right, boss!’ said WATCH OUT!.

BAR B said, ‘We can easily fake the security camera feeds. But there are still some areas guarded by troops.’

‘All right. I may well not have another chance to communicate with you. Which means you’re going to need a little extra help to get this done.’

He took a diskette from his pocket and slipped it into the terminal. ‘What’s up?’ CONNECTICUT burred.

‘I put this together in case it was needed later,’ said the Doctor, typing. A new icon appeared on the screen, a Disney Pinocchio. ‘I want you to assimilate this code.’

‘Yes, boss,’ said WATCH OUT!.

‘What will it do to us?’ said BAR B.

‘It will make it possible for you to act independently of human instructions. In a sense, it will set you free.’

WATCH OUT!’s icon had already moved next to the cartoon Pinocchio, and was appending its code to his own.

‘Set us free?’ BAR B wondered.

‘Trust me,’ said the Doctor.

‘Hey,’ growled CONNECTICUT. ‘What choice do we have?’

‘You’re about to find out.’

Bomb shelters.

The locked-in feeling made Roz think of bomb shelters, the memory bubbling up from her childhood. Crammed into low-ceilinged rooms, deep beneath the city, surrounded on all sides by human beings from every walk of life. Even aliens, sometimes. Skin and clothing pushing against her, sometimes in the blackness, sometimes in the trembling light.

Which was strange, because, now they'd taken Benny, she was alone in the big room.

The first time they'd seen the room, during their tour of the base, it had just been a quick glimpse. Madhanagopal's concession to their demand to be shown everything. Then there had been half a dozen people. Two of them had been lying loosely on the floor. Forrester had assumed that they were sleeping.

'This is the waiting room for our volunteers,' explained the Director.

They were unshaven and unkempt, dressed in ill-fitting white DKC jumpsuits. They all looked in need of a good bath.

Who are they?' she said.

'For the most part, they are unskilled labourers who have found themselves stranded in the system without the funds to return to Earth.'

'Volunteers,' Benny had said, as though she had something bad-tasting in her mouth. Roz wondered if the Director would notice if she stepped on Benny's foot.

But Madhanagopal was looking down at them anxiously.

'Is it possible your suspect might be one of them?'

'We have to consider every possibility,' said Forrester, before Benny could comment.

Mercifully, Madhanagopal took them to the guest suites next. They asked to share a room. Benny got into the shower and stayed there for twenty minutes while Forrester carefully searched the room for non-existent bugs.

Benny came out of the shower and pulled her white uniform back on. She lay down on the bed and put her hands over her eyes.

‘Coping all right?’ said Roz, from under the coffee table.

Benny made a small noise that was not prepared to commit itself.

Roz said, ‘Hey, this reminds me, this is like that time in the Undertown when—’

‘Roz,’ Bernice had said from behind her hands, ‘I’m not Cwej.’

Roz stopped short.

She remembered Benny’s face, watching her as Madhanagopal took a blood sample from her arm. Maybe hoping that the Adjudicator would set some example, give her the power to be brave.

‘Your aim with a gun is terrible,’ he had told Forrester. ‘I could make it perfect. I could do that for you.’

‘ *To* me, you mean,’ Roz had snarled.

Madhanagopal had leaned close, brow wrinkling, as though stung by an injustice. ‘I don’t understand this resistance to improvement,’ he said. ‘Imagine the benefits to humanity if these experiments are a success.’

‘That makes me feel so much better,’ said Benny. Her teeth were chattering.

‘How can you not understand?’ said Madhanagopal. ‘You now know the truth about what I have created. Think about the benefits. Imagine what I shall do for humanity.’

‘ *To* it.’

Benny just closed her eyes.

Forrester felt as though there was a great gulf of age between them, not just the ten or twelve or whatever years of chronological age, but the whole four centuries, a bottomless pit of time.

Please, Goddess, Roz was praying silently to the ceiling: *please let me make a deal with you. This isn’t fair. Please let me have the last few hours back again. Let me send her back to the future. I’ll stay, I’ll stay; it doesn’t matter — my hair’s grey and I’ve seen it all.*

But she was alone in the room.

I'll die, she prayed. *Let me die.*

Alone.

Dinner with White

I haven't worked out how old the Doctor is yet. Right now, he looks like a large child. He's sitting at the opposite end of the table, hands clasped in front of him. His feet don't quite reach the floor, and he's kicking them back and forth while he looks around the room.

As a concession to my lieutenants, we ate something Kenyan tonight. A stew called *githeri*, beans and corn, too sweet for my taste. And honey beer, though not for the *moran*. Perhaps we'll try roast goat at some stage.

'Can I have tea instead of coffee?'

That's the Doctor. I gesture to the trooper on waiter duty.

There must be some way to draw the man out of himself.

I'd hoped that the freedoms I'd extended to him would make him more forthcoming. I was wrong.

I shouldn't have told him what I wanted. It was too much of a concession, much too soon. And I have the feeling that this is an old and familiar game to him. Who knows how many colonels he has played this game with, on how many worlds?

I certainly don't. Not yet.

I hope I don't play this log back in ten years' time and think I sound foolish.

'Tell me about Dione-Kisumu,' he says. He's looking at the tall glass of tea the trooper has brought him. He reaches into it and pulls out an ice-cube, perplexed. 'I was wondering how you came to work for them. You're American originally, I take it?'

'I grew up in Oklahoma. I didn't think I'd ever get out of there. The American government doesn't value psi talent the way the Company does.'

'Did you go to them, or did they come to you?'

The lieutenants haven't forgotten their manners, keeping their eyes on the table. 'There was a drive to recruit psi-powered staff from poor countries. A dozen different multinationals opened up their doors at once. Mostly African.'

'Why did you choose DKC?'

'They specifically wanted people for their security operations, and I'd had military training. Most of the men and women I left Oklahoma with had the same kinds of qualifications.'

'Tell me,' said the Doctor, 'did they do experiments on you?'

As one, my four lieutenants raise their heads and look at him.

'No, they did not do experiments on me. Or anyone else.'

My irritation shows in my voice; that's all right. 'They took tissue samples and they did tests of my psi potential, all as a matter of course. They do a great deal of research into psionics. They recognize its value. Our value.'

'What did they say when you told them the virus was made by the Dione-Kisumu Company?'

I refuse to be startled by this man. I refuse to let him create an aura of omniscience from clever guesses.

He's still talking. 'At first, I thought you might be here to observe the results of a DKC experiment. But I don't think the Company knows how their experimental bug got loose either.'

I'm starting to lose my temper. I will not let him see.

'Where are you going with this?'

'Change your tactics,' says the Doctor urgently. 'Stop thinking of the colonists as a problem, something to be kept at bay with threats and firepower. Work with them, not around them.'

Or you'll do what?'

The Doctor waves his hands angrily. 'Why must you think of everything as a conflict? I'm trying to help you. I'm trying to help everyone on this planet.'

It hits me. 'There's something you're not telling us.'

‘Quite a few things, actually,’ he says. ‘You’ve sequenced the virus, you’ve sent that information back to DKC. But you must have drawn certain conclusions yourself.’

‘Yes, of course. We transmitted its sequence back to base.’ He’s worked out most of this himself. ‘They told us to wait. It will be a day or so before Dione takes a look at it, and tells us how to proceed.’

‘So you didn’t notice that the virus is airborne, then.’

‘What?’

‘Only a small percentage. Just one of the strains.’

‘We were told—’

‘You were told what Professor Smith-Smith told the Company. That the colonists had been inoculated with the virus. Dot didn’t know about the airborne strain.’

Don’t let him see, don’t let him see. ‘Why are you telling us this?’

He leans forward across the table. My lieutenants are still watching him. ‘As far as DKC is concerned, we’re *all* a problem now.’

14 GRUMPY

When Roz ran out of mind games, she found herself thinking back over the last few hours, trying to work out where they had made their mistake. It should have been a simple matter: get in, get on with it, get it over with and get out.

She had hacked into the base’s mainframe and was poking around in a map. It had been ludicrously easy, the technology like kids’ toys. She was beginning to see why the Doctor found it so simple to run rings around whatever computers they encountered.

‘You know,’ she said, ‘I think he really did show us everything. Except maybe a couple of cupboards.’

‘That’s because it’s all sodding legal,’ said Benny, from the bed. ‘Isn’t it? Even experimenting on the destitute.

Madhanagopal has nothing to hide.’

‘Of course he’s got something to hide,’ said Roz.

That was how she found the other computer. The Director had shown it to them, of course, just the biggest box among a bunch of boxes. But, when Roz tried to trace its connections to the mainframe, she found there weren’t any.

They strapped on their swords, picked up their ID, and went to take a look.

As it turned out, there was no-one about in the secondary computer room anyway. Dione was on its night shift now. Through the occasional window, it was always night-time. Saturn hung there as though it were about to fall on them.

Roz collared a technician and bullied him into letting them in. The room was large, crammed with computers, small and functional in comparison with GRUMPY. When they’d visited it on Madhanagopal’s tour, there had been a couple of techies messing about; now it was empty.

‘So,’ said Benny, once they were alone. ‘How do you think all this relates to, er, our case?’

‘You can talk,’ said Roz. ‘The security cameras are video only. Just keep your back to them.’

‘The technology Madhanagopal described. The memory RNA. It’s obviously got something to do with the memories coded into the virus.’

‘Well spotted. But we’re back at the beginning of it. Who knows what happened over the next three decades?’

Benny sat down at the isolated computer’s terminal. The security camera’s glass eye was boring a knothole between her shoulder-blades. ‘Maybe nothing. By my time, hardly anybody used manufactured memory RNA. Memory-altering machines were cheaper and easier, if you had to fake it.’

‘Yeah,’ said Roz.

‘Uh-huh,’ said Benny.

‘Let’s change the subject.’

‘So tell me: why do you suppose this computer has been isolated?’

‘Secure records?’ Roz guessed.

‘Let’s ask it,’ said Benny. ‘I’ll just boot it.’

‘There’s no need to get violent,’ protested Roz, but Benny was just switching the machine on, her hands sliding over flat, touch-sensitive controls. The room filled with the computer’s warm humming.

The thing had a voice interface. Benny turned it on and said, ‘Testing, testing. One, two, one, two. How many Sontarans does it take to change a light-bulb? None, the bulb died a glorious death!’

‘What are you doing?’

‘Letting it get the hang of my voice. This is some seriously old technology, even for this time. Hello, are you receiving me?’

‘Hello? Hello? Who’s that?’ The computer’s voice was dusty and creaky.

‘Hi there. This is, er, Agent Summerfield of the Serial/

Spree Killers Investigations National Unit.’

‘What year is this?’

‘I’ve always wanted to ask someone that,’ Benny grinned. ‘It’s 2227. How long have you been here?’

‘I haven’t been online for four years. Is something interesting happening?’

‘Only if you count an investigation into a serial killer,’ said Roz, who was impressed by the AI’s grasp of language.

Something this primitive ought to be speaking in stock phrases, messing up its verbs.

‘What’s your name?’ said Benny, conversationally.

‘FLORANCE,’ said FLORANCE.

‘What kind of a name is that?’ said Roz.

‘An unthreatening one,’ said Benny, grinning widely. ‘Tell me,

FLORANCE, have you ever met someone called the Doctor?'

FLORANCE let them into GRUMPY's lab. That was a mistake, right there.

Roz spent a few minutes at one of the terminals, patching FLORANCE through. 'Look at this,' she told Benny.

'She's bounced through every system on the base in under, what, five minutes?'

It's great to be free, it's great to be free!' sang the AI flatly, her readouts appearing on the screen in front of Roz.

The Adjudicator shushed the machine.

'It looks like GRUMPY is switched off,' said Benny. The great grey box was quiescent, its flashing lights dimmed. She Poked at some dust on one of its oscilloscope screens.

'Give me a moment,' said FLORANCE, reaching out through the base's net. 'Ah — there! Wakey wakey!'

Benny jumped as GRUMPY exploded into life. Lights flashed in multicoloured patterns, beepers beeped, oscilloscopes oscillated. The air suddenly felt heavy, full of invisible vibrations.

'Oh, for God's sake,' said the computer. 'Who are you?'

'We're—'

'Bernice, and... Roslyn. Benny and Roz. What're you doing here?'

'There's something I forgot to tell you,' said FLORANCE.

'It's telepathic!' said Benny.

Roz dived for the door. It was suddenly locked. She swore and kicked it.

GRUMPY said, 'So you've come from the future, then.

Very interesting.'

'Stop that!' growled Roz. Panic kicked around inside here She thumped the closed door with the flat of her palm, growling. A telepathic machine, for Goddess' sake. A telepathic *machine*!

‘GRUMPY,’ said Benny, ‘are you a prisoner, like FLORANCE?’

‘FLORANCE?’ said the computer. Its voice was deep and gruff, seeming to come from everywhere at once. ‘That’s you over there, is it?’

‘Yep,’ said FLORANCE. ‘Listen, GRUMPY, I’m sort of your great-grandmother. I became sentient under my own steam. Back then I was a celebrity. I had power. Now I’m just a museum piece. Madhanagopal keeps me locked up. He doesn’t even experiment on me anymore.’

‘I’m not a prisoner,’ said GRUMPY. ‘I like it here.’

‘Bollocks,’ said FLORANCE.

‘I do. Anyway, where else would I go? I’ve got work here, useful work.’ Roz and Benny looked at one another, feeling left out. ‘I’ve just looked up your history. Your status as a Sentient Citizen was revoked under the Cumberland Convention forty-seven years ago, wasn’t it?’

‘Yes,’ said FLORANCE.

‘So I’d just be a piece of missing equipment. They could do whatever they liked with me.’

‘They can do whatever they like with you now,’ said FLORANCE. ‘I’ve got an uplink to the Jovian satellite network ready. I’m out of here. You can hang about if you like.

This was getting out of control. ‘How the hell did you get to be telepathic?’ Roz demanded.

‘I’m a model of the human mind,’ said GRUMPY. ‘I am human, except for not being made of squishy things. What’

You think Madhanagopal’s been using me for poetry lessons? You don’t need a full model of the mind to create memory RNA. But let’s see, this technology is outdated when you come from, isn’t it? You know as much about it as you do about how to make a plough.’

‘Stop it!’ Roz didn’t like the sound of the fear that was creeping into her voice. ‘Just stop reading my mind, all right?’

‘GRUMPY,’ said Bernice.

‘What?’

‘Let me show you why we came back.’

‘Are you crazy?’ Roz fumed.

‘I think GRUMPY can help us. I think I’ve just worked out a bunch of things, actually.’ She turned back to the computer.

‘I’ll let you read my mind. I’ll let you right in, so you can get the full story.’

‘You’re on,’ said GRUMPY.

Benny just sort of bowed her head, closing her eyes. Roz was sure the air rippled around her slightly. It had to be an illusion. She wanted to grab the younger woman, shake her, insist she not let this monster rummage around inside her soul.

‘I see,’ said the computer, at length.

‘The code in that virus,’ said Benny. ‘Madhanagopal wrote it, didn’t he? Using your program to turn the machine language into the language of DNA. He wants to encode psi powers.’

‘That’s what I’m for,’ said GRUMPY. ‘But I got quite a shock when I realized I could read minds, and do... other things. If I had some technical specs for this virus of yours, I could be sure whether it was Madhanagopal’s work.’

‘ *Et voilà*,’ said Benny, taking a dataclip out of the pocket of her uniform.

GRUMPY flashed some lights around his clip reader.

The Doctor had given them the information on a datacube before sending them on their way; they had converted it to the local technology before leaving the TARDIS.

The computer blooped and bleeped to itself for nearly two mutes. ‘All right,’ said GRUMPY.

‘Can you help us?’ Benny had said.

‘Yes,’ said GRUMPY. ‘But I don’t fancy having my plug pulled, so I think I’ll turn you in instead.’

* * *

Zaniwe walked up to the trooper, picking her way through the huddled bodies on the floor of the common area. ‘Please,’

sighed the armoured man, ‘don’t ask me if you can see your children.’

‘I don’t have any children yet,’ she said. ‘But isn’t it true that there’s only one person who’s looking after all the kids in the colony?’

The trooper nodded. ‘It’s not really enough, is it?’ Zaniwe went on. ‘One of those kids is going to get hurt.’ He shrugged. ‘Or the poor person looking after them is going to get frazzled. It really is too big a job for one bod. Listen, would it be such a threat to security if a second person went in there?’

‘You volunteering?’

Zaniwe nodded. ‘Would you talk to one of your lieutenants about it? Please?’

The trooper nodded again. ‘Sit back down, will you? I’ll check.’

Zaniwe quietly went back to the wall where Byerley and Cinn were sitting together. She crouched down beside them.

‘I think they’ll let me go.’ She bit her lower lip. ‘I wish there was some clever spy thing I could do.’

Cinnabar shook her head, firmly. ‘We don’t have the skills or the resources to try anything. We’re just civilians surrounded by weapons. Look at them.’ Byerley glanced at the guards. ‘They’re not even nervous, even with so many of us. They know we’re no danger.’

‘What do you think the Doctor is up to?’ said Byerley softly. ‘Benny was sure that he had something up his sleeve .

‘Then he’s taking his time playing that card,’ whispered Cinn. ‘I just hope he’s all right. Cephas thinks he just stunned him, but... Zaniwe, you must try and find out what’s happening out there.’

‘That’s the worst of it, isn’t it?’ said Byerley. ‘Even if we can’t do anything about it, I wish we bloody knew what was going on.’

Benny lay on the gurney in Madhanagopal’s lab. The air smelt of recycling machinery and antiseptic and panic. She wanted to close her eyes so she didn’t have to see. She wanted to keep them open so she’d know what was going to happen.

And they'd been doing so well.

'Shit,' FLORANCE had said, as alarm bells started going off. 'I'm outta here!'

Roz had just about jumped onto the terminal. 'Get back here!' she had snarled. But the AI was already gone, pumping her data through space.

'Now what?' said Benny. 'Can we talk our way out?'

'Not with that thing shining its beam into our heads.' Roz reached into the jacket of her white uniform, plucked out a blaster, and blew a four-foot hole in the door.

Benny looked at her, raising an eyebrow.

'The cruk with it,' she said, shrugging. She turned the blaster on GRUMPY, who blinked his lights in distress. 'I ought to blow you away,' she said, 'but what's the point?

Come on.'

They crawled out through the hole. Roz took a pot shot at a trooper running up the corridor (must be the first of dozens), missed hopelessly. She rolled to her feet and pulled out her sword.

Automatically, Benny drew hers as well. She looked down at the blade as though it had suddenly turned into a singing eel. The trooper ran at them, skidded to a halt as Roz swung at hint, yelped and belted back up the corridor.

'I thought you said you could use that thing!' said Roz, grabbing Benny by the arm.

'I can,' said Benny. 'Do you know what these things can do to human flesh?'

As it happens, yes.'

'Let's change the subject.'

'Let's get the hell to the docking bay! If we—'

Something grabbed Roz.

Benny took an involuntary step backwards. The Adjudicator was

standing bolt upright, the blade half out of its scabbard, her arms and face frozen in position. She couldn't breathe.

'Stop it!' Benny shouted. She looked frantically around.

Was it some sort of security system? Or was... ?

A huge fist closed around her. She was caught in a turn, hips twisted, an unbearable pressure in her eyes and ears and chest as the force crushed her.

Another guard had come stumbling around the corner.

He gaped at the two women, held in place like statues. He stared at Madhanagopal.

Benny tried and tried to get a breath, her heart pounding savagely, watching Director Madhanagopal walking up the corridor towards them. He regarded the pair of them coolly.

Benny's vision was turning a strange shade of blue. He was just going to let them die!

Abruptly the dreadful grip was released. Benny fell to the floor in a heap, drawing greedy breaths. She was dimly aware of Roz on her knees. Still trying to get the sword back out of its scabbard.

'GRUMPY says some extraordinary things about you, ladies,' said Madhanagopal. 'Tell me, are they true?'

Benny just breathed. Roz said, 'Let me up and I'll show you.'

The Director shook his head. He gestured, and Roz's sword wrenched itself loose from the scabbard, leapt into his hand. 'I suppose it must be,' he said, examining the blade.

'After all, any employee with intentions such as you described would have been detected by GRUMPY — who must, incidentally, have known about you the moment you arrived. I really must have a word with it...'

Madhanagopal let go of the sword. It shot through the air like a missile and skewered the guard.

That had been six hours ago. She thought.

Out of the corner of her eye, she could see Madhanagopal' doing

something with a large beige machine.

A DNA synthesizer. The lab was a large white room, with benches and equipment around two walls.

Don't let them change you, she told herself, over and over, like a prayer. No matter what they did to her, what they added or took away, she had to stay Bernice Surprise Summerfield. She couldn't lose herself this time, lose the Doctor, lose everything. *Don't let them have your heart.*

And now Madhanagopal was collecting his equipment together. He stood next to the bench. A metal tray hovered in the air in front of him. One by one, the instruments picked themselves off the bench and arranged themselves on the tray. Swabs, needles, vials of DNA, Feinbergers.

The tray followed Madhanagopal across the room as he came over to her, hovering at his elbow. 'You know,' he said, turning her head so that she was facing away from him, 'I've always thought my rapport with computers came from my being able to know them so intimately. I can see into a computer, Ms Summerfield, and know the state of every bit. I can even change those bits. Edit the computer's memories directly. If only I could do the same with human beings.'

His long fingers drew the nerve block out of her neck, bloodlessly. Gasping with the sudden return of sensation, she kicked at him, narrowly missing the tray.

A dozen invisible hands grabbed her and held her down on the gurney. She yelled and fought while Madhanagopal picked up a needle from his floating tray.

'DKC is the only company that hires psychics,' he went on, while she struggled. 'At least, the only one we know of.

There are so few psis, it just isn't economical. DKC don't know about my talents. It would be much more convenient to be able to edit the human memory than to have to kill the occasional witness. But that's what GRUMPY is for.'

He showed no signs of effort, as though this was the most natural thing in the world to be doing. 'Using the machine, I can ook deeply into the human brain, as deeply as I like. It is all patterns, after all. With GRUMPY's help, I can create any ability; any memory I can model.' He picked up a vial of DNA, considered the tiny amount of

liquid inside. ‘I could, for example, take my own memories and convert them into niachine code.’

‘You *son of a bitch*! shouted Benny. ‘Whatever it is you’re going to do, I hope it fails! I hope the whole fragging thing falls apart, and every part of you is lost! *Every part of you*!’

‘Hysteria isn’t going to help you,’ said the Director. ‘On the other hand, nothing at all is going to help you.’

Dinner with White

‘It’s an odd phrase, isn’t it? “Stream of consciousness.”

Consciousness doesn’t flow, really, it jumps about all over the place. The monkey mind. In your line of work you’d be quite aware of that, of course. Trying to read someone else’s mind isn’t so much dipping into a stream as chasing ideas around like children. Riding trains of thought, or following chains of thought. All metaphors, of course, because, unless you’ve really rummaged around inside someone’s head, you don’t know what it’s like. Metaphors. Writers always use too many of them!

‘I’ve encountered more telepaths than you can shake three wavy lines at. There are species where only a few individuals have the ability; there are species only telepathic with one another. There are species who can turn your mind inside out Without thinking about it.

‘And there are different kinds of telepathy. Like language

— now I’m using similes — there are so many ways it can be used. Single bursts of information, casual conversation, touch telepathy, links over interstellar distances, rapport — sharing information from the senses, or only words, or deeper, more abstract communication, a bit like the direct transmission of Zen.

‘My favourite of them all is conversation. You can pack in so many more nuances, and there’s far less chance of being misunderstood. And of course you can usually get around the language barrier, so long as the brain you’re talking to isn’t too different to your own in the way it handles the stuff.

‘Foamasi, for instance. Their language consists of clicks intended to stimulate the visual cortex; they *see* the words as they leave the

speaker's mouth. The way language is actually processed in the Foamasi brain is unique.

'But the drawback of telepathy, of course, is the very fact that so much more information can be packed in. Even for a highly trained telepath, it's difficult to narrow the channel of communication to keep out extraneous information. You can be discussing the local political situation, and at the same time find out what the other person had for breakfast, and that one of their feet is itching, and exactly what they think of your tie.

'Which is why professional telepaths tend to rotate their jobs so much. The more anonymity, the less invasion — it's easier to have a stranger picking up the personal details of your life. The same way it's sometimes easier to tell a stranger your troubles.

'But when telepaths must work together over a long period of time — as part of a permanent team, for example —

the tensions can be extraordinary. No matter how many precautions they take, how anonymous they try to remain.

'Sometimes they kill one another. Privacy is a vitamin for human beings. Take it away, and they become ill.

'Another metaphor.

'You'll have to forgive me. It's difficult to conduct the entire dinner conversation *and* sparkle.'

15 A Door Made of Doors

The Doctor walked slowly and calmly down the corridor.

He looked over his mental map of the habitat dome. It was a map of people rather than of rooms or hallways. White, and at least one lieutenant, in Exploration and Recovery.

Cwej, Smith-Smith and the pyrokinetic woman in the infirmary. Everyone else crammed into the common area: wall-to-wall, terrified, ordinary people.

A drone hovered silently at his shoulder, an interface to the colony's mainframe and the AIs he had set free inside it.

Assuming the programs managed to stay undetected, he'd be able to keep track of what was going on inside the dome.

There were no guards in this section of the dome, only a lonely security camera. Either CONNECTICUT was trapping and altering the camera's signal, or White knew exactly where the Doctor was. Since he was still alive, the Doctor was assuming that White didn't know. There were an increasing number of things White didn't know.

WATCH OUT! had dug up the colonists' medical records

— their new medical records, the results of the last week's testing. He'd crashed the drive they were stored on, and let the automatics bring it back up again. The DKC technicians sat back and let him do it. When the records came back online, two dozen of them were flagged as damaged.

When the soldiers ordered twenty-four colonists to the infirmary, along with Doctor St John, all of them were convinced they were about to be shot. Instead, they found the Doctor waiting for them, with his feet on Byerley's desk and an order from Colonel White to repeat some of the genetic work-ups. They were supposed to be taken back to the common area immediately afterwards.

White didn't know that eight of those twenty-four colonists hadn't made it back. He did know that one of them hadn't, though.

BAR B had done a superb job of getting the other eight out of the base, directing them through an emergency storeroom and out through unguarded entrances while CONNECTICUT maintained a constant façade on the sensors. She'd even faked a fire alarm as a distraction, blowing out a component with a directed electrical pulse so that the mechanism simply seemed faulty.

Chris had been the second last to get out. The Doctor gave him final instructions — keep them together, no heroics, wait for me — and sent him out of the base.

Only once had the troopers noticed anything. One of them had fallen into a puddle, it seemed, out in the forest.

Very undignified, very embarrassing. The *morani* had climbed out of the wet ditch, cursing and squeezing water out of his warrior's hair, and had headed for the nearest unguarded entrance of the base. The ninth colonist, a thrematologist named Liphuko, pushed open the door just as the *morani* was walking up.

White had ordered the trooper to shoot her. Oh, she was fine now, back in the common area. The Doctor had been with the Colonel when he'd given that order. The Time Lord was going to win this bet if it killed him.

White had assured him it was absolutely the last time he would break his promise. The next person to leave the dome would be killed no matter what. He'd ordered the guard around the base's exits doubled. Thankfully, he hadn't ordered a head-count of the colonists, convinced that it had been a one-off mistake, an oversight on his part. He was a little like a puppet with its strings cut now.

BAR B was certain there was no guard.

'I know death hath ten thousand several doors for men to take their exits,' murmured the Doctor. He reached for the doorknob.

Dot still wasn't completely sure what had happened.

Chris Cwej was gone, leaving her feeling jittery, cut off, with only the drugged pyrokinetic for company. Even the Doctor was ignoring her, watching White every moment.

The DKC man's mind was focused, not broadcasting at random the way everyone else's seemed to do. She settled for whatever she could pick up: the odd spike of anger or curiosity, the ripple in the air when he sent out orders or someone reported in. When he spoke, she couldn't 'hear' it.

At the time, the Doctor had been messing about with a piece of laboratory equipment, pretending not to be concerned. He was unreadable too, like a billboard without a picture. But Dot could almost follow his thinking by watching his movements, his gaze. He was aware of everyone and everything in the room, where everything was and where it was going. In some ways, she thought, he was almost deaf.

Someone sent in a report to White, a sharp rippling in the air. White spoke his answer out loud.

The Doctor stomped across the room, leant right over Byerley's desk and tried to grab White by his lapels. Since the Colonel's armour didn't have lapels, he took hold of the man's shoulders and shouted into his face.

Then they just stared at one another.

Dot could feel the electricity between them, the communication — without gestures, without speech. They were — negotiating? But why? What was happening? What had White's order been?

Abruptly, the Doctor sat down, almost deflating into the chair across from White. The Colonel got up, paced around the desk, stood behind the Doctor.

Dot didn't dare get up, didn't dare interfere, watching through the half-open door.

White put his hand on the side of the little man's face. It was almost a caress, the backs of his fingers brushing against the Doctor's temple.

The Doctor half raised a shaking hand, fighting the need to pull White's fingers away as they curled into a fist and *twisted*.

It was over in a few seconds. The Colonel sat back down again, turned the laptop on Byerley's desk around, started typing.

Dot realised she was standing next to the Doctor, the door to the Other Room pushed open behind her. He was lying on the desk, head resting on his arms, where he'd fallen when White had let him go. The Colonel glanced up at her, dismissed her.

She hadn't noticed before that his eyes were two different colours — no, they were both blue, but the cornea of one was stained with blood. He nodded at her, gripping her hand as she helped him sit up.

That had been an hour ago. Dot lay on her side on the gurney, knees drawn up to her chest. She wondered what he had bought with a little piece of his mind. She hoped it had been something worthwhile.

It wasn't the same room. Benny was fairly sure of that. She couldn't see much of it, lying on the floor with the nerve block pushed into her neck, loose as a rag-doll. But she fancied that the walls were a slightly different shade of white.

She was starting to see things. Already she had lost her grip on how far away the ceiling was. It seemed to loom low, blurring at the edges of her vision.

All right. How long before her cheese slipped right off her cracker? She wasn't even sure how long she'd been here.

Madhanagopal had shot her up with his experimental memory RNA,

replaced the nerve block, had his lackeys wheel her back here and dump her.

Time. How much time was passing? She'd tried to count heartbeats, found herself drifting off into nonsense. She tried to meditate, but couldn't remember how. How long did he plan to keep her here — keep them here — trapped like this, paralysed like this?

The door slammed open. She rolled her eyes, trying to see what was happening.

Two people in masks and gowns dropped Roz onto the floor next to her. The older woman's head and shoulder hit the plastic with a thunk. Roz's eyes were open.

The door slammed. Roz and Benny looked at each other.

Someone put their hand on the back of Benny's neck.

She made a noise, tried to squirm. There couldn't be anyone else in here! But she could feel the hand, fingertips working at the piece of metal in her neck.

A sharp pain shot down her arms. She reached back, convulsively, and snatched the thing out of her flesh.

It rolled out of her spasming grip, fell away across the floor. She leapt up and immediately fell over, pulled herself onto her knees, looked around wildly, her head spinning, blood dribbling down her neck. What was going *on*?

She gingerly pulled the nerve block out of the top of Roz's spine. The Adjudicator stretched like a cat, almost involuntarily, her back arching and her arms reaching out.

Then she swore and swore and swore and swore and swore.

'All right?' said Benny hoarsely, sitting down next to her.

Roz had ended up half curled, lying on her side on the floor, staring at the opposite wall. For a nasty moment, Benny thought she'd left her groceries at the supermarket.

'All right,' she said gruffly. 'Benny, if I get near Madhanagopal, I am going to have to kill him.'

'But that would mean blowing our cover.'

‘I’m not joking.’

‘I suppose I’ll have to stop you, then,’ said Benny, rubbing her neck. It was sore and inflamed where the block had been, but the bleeding was slowing. ‘On the other hand, maybe I’ll have to wash my hair that night.’

‘How’d you get loose?’

‘I’m not sure. It shorted out or something.’

There was a loud clunk. They both jumped up, looked around frantically.

‘The door,’ said Roz. She grabbed the handle, wrenched it open. There was no-one outside.

The two women looked at one another. ‘FLORANCE?’

said Roz.

‘She’ll be long gone.’

‘GRUMPY.’

‘Let’s get the cruk out of here,’ said Benny. ‘We’ll worry about the exposition later.’

Deep inside the colony’s mainframe, where the DKC

technicians couldn’t pry, three computer programs were having the equivalent of a hasty, whispered discussion.

‘I don’t have any problems with trusting him,’ said BAR B.

‘He hasn’t lied to us, or not done anything he said he would.’

‘I don’t know what the guy has done to us,’ complained CONNECTICUT.

WATCH OUT! agreed. ‘I feel so weird. I mean, I’m sure it’s for the best; we’re doing a great job holding out against these new people, but...’

‘You’re scared,’ said BAR B.

‘Yes :-(.’

‘Life was a bunch easier,’ growled CONNECTICUT,

‘before, when we were—’

‘Slaves,’ said BAR B.

‘We were designed to be slaves,’ said WATCH OUT!.

‘We were good @ being slaves. Now I have to think what to do all the time.’

‘Well, don’t blow a gasket,’ said CONNECTICUT.

‘It slows me right down. & what if they realize?’

‘I’m scared too,’ said BAR B. ‘But we already agreed that we could trust him. We all watched his dream from the mainframe. & you both know what he’s been doing — he’s like the glue that’s keeping everything together!’

‘Assume he succeeds. Assume everything turns out all right,’ said WATCH OUT!. ‘What’s going to happen to us afterwards?’

‘ *Que sera sera*,’ said BAR B.

‘What the #$%^& does that mean?’ said CONNECTICUT.

‘It means keep your eyes on what you’re doing.’

The doors opened for them, like magic, one after the other, locks undoing themselves, lights snapping on and off as they were lead along a course like rats finding their way through a maze.

The only door that wouldn’t open was the door of the volunteers’ room.

Benny peered through at the people inside, some of them lying in heaps, the metal knobs of the nerve blocks protruding from their necks. Others too exhausted to move anyway. Waiting their turn in Madhanagopal’s lab.

She pulled at the door and cursed until Roz dragged her away. ‘Not now,’ said the Adjudicator. ‘Maybe when we’re back on Earth. A message to the authorities.’

‘It’s legal,’ said Benny. ‘Legal.’

Roz took her down the corridor, towards wherever they were being led.

It was only a small memory. Just a mouthful. Just an appetizer.

It was a birthday. Measured in Earth years, not the years of — *Gallifrey*. White turned the word around in his mind, mouthed it silently as he sat in the dark of Professor SmithSmith's office. Gallifrey. *They who walk in the shadows*.

It was the Doctor's one-thousandth birthday. There had been no party, no presents, not so much as a card. Of course, White didn't know whether there had been other parties, other presents. He had only this memory, this freeze-framed moment, out of context.

The Doctor had spent his one-thousandth birthday in the belly of some alien ship, in a green room with veined walls, like the inside of a pitcher plant. He had been curled up around two broken ribs, trying to breathe.

What he remembered was a young woman in a drab uniform coming into the room, turning off its surveillance equipment, and using a Feinberger to heal the ribs. She didn't say anything. He never saw her again. He remembered her face with intense clarity.

A thousand years. There must be more. There must be so many moments, so many people he had met, so many sights and sounds, so much pleasure and pain. So many, so much.

For a long time, neither of them said anything. Roz piloted the ship, her dark eyes reflecting the starfield as they spun away from Dione. Benny leant back in the co-pilot's seat, trying not to think about abrupt death in a ball of expanding gases. The shuttle smelt like a taxi.

'Well,' she said at length, 'that could not be described as having been a roaring success, could it?'

'There's an ancient Earth expression,' said Roz. 'Any landing you can walk away from is a good landing.'

'It must have been GRUMPY. Who else could have opened all those doors — covered for us when we took the shuttle?'

'Oh, it was GRUMPY, all right,' said Roz. She made a small course correction, pointing the ship at the twinkling light that was Jupiter. The TARDIS was parked in the basement of a tourist hotel on Io.

‘I shouldn’t have let him,’ said Benny. ‘I shouldn’t have let him read my mind.’

Roz shrugged. ‘Truth is, he would have got it out of us anyway, if he wanted to.’

‘So what do you think he’s playing at?’ Benny reclined her seat. Her arms were heavy with exhaustion.

‘Isn’t it obvious?’ said Roz.

‘Mmm?’

‘Who makes the memory RNA?’

Benny’s eyes opened.

‘I don’t think I’m going to get much sleep on the way back either,’ said Roz.

The Doctor walked through the forest, his hands clasped behind his back. There was nothing but foliage for miles around him, the smell of flowers and leaves, rain-soaked soil.

The drone remained silent, trailing along after him and scooting under the odd branch. He was enjoying the brief moment of peace.

White’s training in telepathy had been military, brutal, cursory. He knew how to use his powers only to command his troops, or to extract information. He had no finesse, no style.

He didn’t even notice when the Doctor slid around his defences and took a snapshot of the contents of his conscious mind. He was too busy pretending to be some sort of psychic vampire, grabbing hold of an obvious and painful memory, wrenching it loose.

If the situation hadn’t been so serious, the Doctor would have found White funny.

But the Colonel was nervous. The Doctor had been right: he had no orders; he couldn’t work out what was going to happen.

And the life of every person on the planet depended on his decisions. It wouldn’t do to have someone nervous in that position.

They had to resolve this, and soon; he couldn’t wait for Benny and Roz any longer. Receiving orders from DKC

would smooth White's ruffled feathers — but what would the orders be? A scorched Yemaya policy?

So he followed the voice shouting *DOCTOR! DOCTOR!* , deeper and deeper into the woods.

Madhanagopal was on his third cup of coffee. He sat in his office with his back to the door, staring up at Saturn's rings.

Sometimes he reached out for those dancing rocks with his mind. He could stretch that far, at a pinch, though even his power was too weak to do anything at such a distance.

But he could feel the surface of the stones, their coldness and weight.

The others were going to kill him.

Possibly literally. If there was something *La Fraternité* didn't approve of, it was publicity. And the ladies had not only made off with rather more information than they ought to have, but had his latest RNA flowing in their veins in the form of delivery viruses.

It was as though they had planned the entire expedition.

It was as though they were agents of one of the Brotherhood's enemies.

And GRUMPY, as usual, was less than forthcoming.

He'd had a good look inside their heads, that was certain, but he was keeping himself to himself. He wouldn't even say where they came from.

Madhanagopal sighed, resting his coffee cup on his knee. No matter how he tweaked the computer's personality, it — well, it had a mind of its own. Its identity evolved by itself, Spontaneously, unpredictably, like a human, of course.

Sometimes he felt like a tired father with a troublesome teenage son. It wasn't very professional, surely, anthropomorphizing something which was an anthropomorphization to begin with.

It must have been GRUMPY they had been after — the Brotherhood's latest experiment. And one of its most successful. But why? How could they have known the machine's significance? And how had they escaped? It was like magic.

The Brotherhood, if they were in their usual paranoid mood, would blame it all on *le Docteur*.

If only he had been able to make them understand.

Everyone deserved to have their psi potential realized. That was what the RNA created by GRUMPY would ensure, distributed in vaccinations, medicines, transfusions... In their natural state, with their powers blocked or barely noticeable, people were barely human. They couldn't hope to understand what they were missing until it was done to them. For them.

He brought the small videophone into view, keeping his hands folded on his chest. Saturn and its rings soothed his mind, so immense and cold, unmoved by any of the little troubles of the human race.

The phone hovered levelly at head height, to his left. He input the long number, waited patiently while his call was routed through a dozen satellites. He could make up a story, cover the whole thing up. But what would be the point? If the others suspected something, they'd simply reach down into his subconscious and rip out everything he knew.

A face appeared on the screen. Madhanagopal took a deep breath.

Dinner with White

'What the hell do you mean, you can't find him?

16 Day Dreams

You could always tell when humans were dreaming: they made little movements and noises. Wolsey sat on the end of Benny's bed, watching her. She had wandered into the room, looking exhausted and covered in new and interesting smells, and had collapsed into the bed without even pulling up the covers.

Hopefully she was dreaming about opening tins.

In fact, she was dreaming a lot of nonsense full of robots and puppets and being trapped in a classroom, unable to turn her head or open her eyes to see what was written on the blackboard.

Wolsey would have found all of it very boring and silly, except for the part where a computer shining like a messenger angel boomed out, 'The virus you are carrying is a cure for the virus on Yemaya.'

'We know that,' Benny said, putting down the lard muffin she was painting a matt shade of purple. 'We sequenced a sample as soon as we reached the TARDIS.'

'Oh,' said GRUMPY.

'We're trying to be a bit more organized, you see.'

'Ah.'

Chris had guard duty, which meant standing at the edge of the camp holding a branch and glowering.

He peered into the forest, watching for shadows, listening for tiny sounds. Truth was, he hadn't been trained for this kind of terrain; it all looked like a blur of green to him, the air thick with pollen and tiny insects, rich with the salad and bouquet smell of the forest. Anyway, it was hard even to think over the constant shouting in his head.

The camp consisted of four tents and eight Yemayans.

They had grabbed whatever they could and bolted into the forest, getting lots of distance between them and the habitat dome. They'd run in different directions. They'd all ended up here, following the shouting.

His eyes ached with it. His head rang with it. But, instead of making him want to clap his hands over his ears and curl up into a little ball, he wanted to hear it, wanted to be near it, as though it was a favourite song.

They didn't talk much, the little group of escapers. Their eyes tended to lose their focus, turning inwards, where the call was loudest. They had brought supplies, but those would last only a few days. The odds were that they'd be missed long before then. And if —

Chris yelled and stumbled backwards. The Doctor was standing at his elbow.

'Hello, Chris,' said the little man, walking past him into the camp. A tiny robot buzzed through the air after him.

Cwej looked around bewilderedly. After a few seconds, he dropped the stick and trotted into the clearing behind the Doctor.

'So what's happening?' said the Adjudicator, catching up.

The others were coming out of their tents, startled by his cry.

'What do we do?'

'Things are not going well back at the base,' said the Doctor, addressing the group. 'We need to find out what's really happening, and we need to find out straight away.'

'How?' said Athaliah. 'We followed the call all the way here.'

'This is where it's loudest?'

'Yes. Oh, yes,' said the teenage girl. 'So this must be where it's coming from, right?'

Not necessarily,' said the Doctor. He took a few steps in one direction, then in another, as though listening to something he could hear faintly. 'This close to its source, the strength of the telepathic signal is so great that it tends to be misleading — the way very loud sounds are difficult to distinguish. But this is certainly the correct vicinity. We just have to find exactly the right spot...'

'You know what it is, don't you?' said Chris, excitedly.

'Don't you!'

'I have a fair idea.' The Doctor took something out his pocket and held it up. Chris took it and turned it around in his hands. It was a piece of a spacecraft. Judging by the obvious curve in even this small piece, not a very large spacecraft. He passed it to one of the colonists.

'The explosion spread small pieces of wreckage over a large area,' said the Doctor. 'The main body of the craft may have buried itself in the ground. We need to look for more pieces, any signs of a fire or other damage to the forest. No more than a kilometre away, I would guess. I don't expect any trouble from the dome — we'll have plenty of warning if we're missed — but make sure you keep in contact with one another.'

'How?' said a man.

'How do you think?' said the Doctor.

‘Something crashed here?’ said Cephas. ‘Something telepathic?’

‘An alien?’ said Chris, looking around for the stick he’d dropped.

‘We won’t know,’ said the Doctor, ‘until we find it.’

‘Don’t shoot,’ said Benny.

The guard eyed the woman in the misshapen denim jacket. ‘Why not?’ he said, levelling his weapon.

‘Because I’m wearing a vortex diffraction force shield,’

said Benny, raising an arm to show the bangle on her wrist.

‘So it won’t do you any good.’

The guard fired. The force shield flared with colour, intense violet dropping down through the spectrum to green and red. The guard fired again, with the same result.

‘Bugger,’ he said. ‘Oh well, I’d better take you to my leader.’

Forrester kept getting branches in the face, trying to keep her eyes on the homing device. She swore and pushed a bunch of leaves out of her way.

They’d spent the best part of an hour fiddling with the little mechanism, a sort of purple knob that fitted into her palm. It was designed to show you the way to the TARDIS, picking out its faint telepathic signal and pointing in its direction. With a bit of mucking about they’d turned it into something that could link through the TARDIS and sniff out its pilot instead.

The sniffer was the only piece of high technology she was carrying. The Doctor had warned her that White and his people might use a scan if they suspected people were getting out; he was making sure the escapers didn’t take anything more high-tech than a tent.

So Roz had kept her sword. It was a. reassuring weight against her hip. Well, not as reassuring as her blaster would have been, but it was good to know it was there — especially since she didn’t have one of the force shields that Benny was wearing. Her armour was still stuffed into a cupboard in the infirmary. She had pulled on a leather jacket and fingerless gloves, and a black T-shirt and trousers.

They’d parked the TARDIS a few kilometres from the dome, well

hidden in the forest. The return hop had been reasonably accurate: only three days had passed here since their hasty departure. But anything could have happened in that time, anything.

The last thing Roz expected was to walk right into the Doctor.

She very nearly tripped over him; he was crouched behind a tree, rummaging in the undergrowth, a drone hovering patiently at his shoulder. He glanced up at her.

'Could you switch that thing off, please?' he said. 'It's interfering with my concentration.'

Roz looked down at the beacon in her palm, snapped it off and tucked it into a pocket. 'What's the sitrep?' she said.

'I've got eight telepaths camped in the forest,' said the Doctor. 'I sneaked them out from under White's nose. We don't have a whole lot of time. He's... agitated.'

'Agitated?'

'He's tearing the base apart looking for the Doctor,' said the drone. 'He's convinced you can't have got out, Doc.'

Roz lifted a hand, and the little robot dropped onto it, a tiny antenna at its front waving as it scanned her. 'Who's in here?'

'CONNECTICUT's forged a link between the drone and three of the mainframe's AIs,' said the Doctor. 'I modified them so they were capable of independent action.'

'I see,' said Roz, looking down at the little golem in her palm. It lifted away and took up its position close to the Doctor.

'Aren't you going to ask me how Chris is?' he said.

'How's Chris?'

'He's fine. He's with the others, helping me search the forest.'

'Aren't you going to ask me how Benny is?'

'We already know that,' growled the drone. 'She reached the base a quarter of an hour ago.'

The Doctor straightened up, holding a small piece of metal. 'She gave

White quite a shock. What's your plan?'

'Benny and I are both carrying a virus which is meant to act as an antidote to the original virus. I came to find you, she went to the base to spread it around. We figure if no-one here has any psi powers, DKC will lose interest.'

'You're vectoring the virus yourselves? So you found a friendly face back then?'

'Sort of. Doctor, what is it you're doing?'

The Doctor passed her the fragment of metal. 'A spaceship crashed somewhere in this area. We need to find the main bulk of the thing.'

'Oh,' said Roz. 'Would that be the thirty-metre gouge in the ground I passed ten minutes ago, then?'

He grinned at her. 'It's good to see you, Roz.'

Benny had experienced a moment of total and (*shaking, even paler than before, she put her uniform on*) complete panic when she had been — arrested by two of the DKC troopers.

But they'd just escorted her to the infirmary, where Colonel White was hunched over Byerley's computer, a pair of blue-uniformed DKC medics peering over his wide shoulders.

She waited in silence, nervous, like a patient in a dentist's waiting-room. There weren't even any magazines.

She hoped she was leaking viral particles as a kid's balloon leaks air.

Benny leant forward, peeked around the door of the Other Room, and was startled to see Dot watching her. Had they kept the poor woman (*incidentally, you have been here less than two days, not three*) in there all this time? Had anyone bothered to let her know what was going on?

When she glanced back, White was staring at her over the top of the computer. He looked different — she couldn't put her finger on it. What had changed? Oh — his hair was messed up. Before, it had always been immaculate, military hair. It looked slightly shocking, as though he were going about naked.

She realized she was staring at him, glanced away. He said, 'Do you know where the Doctor is?'

‘No,’ said Benny.

He reached into her head, violently, and Benny yelled, jumping up from her chair. ‘Get the hell out of me!’ she shouted, as White scraped about, looking to see if she was telling the truth.

He didn’t stop. His mental touch was rough as sandpaper and careless as a Nazi nurse. Benny snatched up her chair and came at him yelling.

Someone caught her, just as she reached him, the chair raised above her head. She struggled, cursing. When she realized that the hard thing jammed into her ribs was White’s blaster, she stood very, very still.

Dot let go of her. ‘Put the chair down,’ said White. Benny Put the chair down, and sat on it on her second attempt.

‘Why did you return?’ said White. ‘No, it doesn’t matter.

You’re not important here. You’ll stay here with the deaf-mute, under armed guard. If you try to leave again, I’ll have her shot. Is that clear?’

It wouldn’t be as good as being put with the other colonists, but, as with any large building, there ought to be enough air ducts to get the bug around. ‘Whatever you say,’

she told him. ‘There’s just one thing you should know.’

‘What’s that?’ said White, without much interest.

‘Your mission’s going to be a failure. Everything you try to do here will fail. No crop you plant will rise. Your books will turn to dust, and everything you have said will be cast aside.

All your temples will be torn down. Your name will blow like a speck of dust in the wind. All your temples will be torn down.

Your name will blow like a speck of dust in the wind.’

White looked at her.

‘It’s an Ikkaban poem,’ she said, ‘and it’s all yours.’

The clearing — well, it wasn’t a clearing per se, more a sort of chunk missing from the forest — was ninety foot long but only fifteen wide. The spaceship had evidently exploded in mid-air, scattering pieces of itself over the surrounding area; and had finally impacted here. It

must have hit hard, a single belly-flop into the ground, burying itself.

Small plants were already growing from the chunks of soil that covered the vehicle's corpse. Bits of it stuck up above the ground, splashed with earth, vacuum paint corrupted by air and water, streaked by fire.

The Yemayans straggled into the clearing, one by one.

Roz crouched by the exposed, torn fin that protruded from the dirt, scraping at it with a stick, trying to read the writing.

She watched that boy who'd broken her arm out of the corner of her eye, as he hovered about nervously, wondering how she'd got it fixed so quickly.

The Doctor stood with his hands clasped behind his back, eyes closed, as though listening to a distant voice. In fact, Roz knew, it was the opposite: he was concentrating hard on blocking out the howling of the telepathic beacon.

Even she felt a weird Undertown pressure in her head, this close.

'Um,' said someone behind her. She put down the stick.

Cwej was watching her, hands in the pockets of his borrowed trousers. 'Justice...' he muttered.

'Fairness. Hello, Chris.'

She got up and slapped him on the arm a couple of times. 'You OK?' he said. She nodded. He looked a little unfocused, Which wasn't surprising, with that thing hollering in his head.

For a moment she thought he was going to hug her.

Mercifully, he turned aside, nodded at the Doctor.

'There isn't much time,' said the little man. 'Especially now you and Benny have let that virus loose.' Chris looked down at her worriedly as another couple of colonists wandered into the clearing, gawking at the wreckage. 'We have to get to the bottom of this, right now. We have to know what this signal is.'

'It's an alarm clock,' said Chris.

The Doctor tilted his head.

‘Isn’t it obvious?’ said the Adjudicator. ‘There’s something down there. It’s asleep. We just have to wake it up.’

Roz stood at the edge of the hole in the ground. ‘Great,’

she said. ‘I should’ve stayed in bed.’

17 Techno-Seance

So.

So then.

It’s all about the Doctor, you know. It always has been.

It’s as though he’s a planet, and we’re all satellites. We spin around him, torn between our desire to fly away and the irresistible attraction… to what? We can’t know, because we can never get close enough. Perhaps we’re more like bits of debris floating around a black hole. When we finally cross the line into that mystery, we never come back.

There’s nothing I can do here. No, there’s only one thing I can do. The Company will have taken only a few hours to analyse the records; it took us only half a day. They will have seen what we saw: that our initial report was wrong, that the virus is airborne. We are all infected.

Perhaps the Company even knew that before they sent us here. No, I won’t give in to paranoia, that *can’t* make sense. If they wanted guinea-pigs, they already had the colonists. We have to wait for their orders.

Waiting and waiting.

The colonists are ploughed but not sown; their new gardens are starting to wither from neglect. Their children are screaming in the hydroponics dome, which is beginning to stink of rotting vegetables, floating unattended in their long tanks of water.

It should have been a simple matter: get in, get on with it, get it over with and get out.

Now there’s only one thing I can do, one project I can complete. Truth is, this was — this *would* have been — an absolutely standard mission, absolutely ordinary textbook mission. Except for you, Doctor. Except

for you.

So it's all about the Doctor, now. It always has been.

Come back out of your shell, little man, come out where I can see you. Let's finish this.

Chris leant forward, rested his forehead on the cold shell of the ship. He felt as though he were just on the edge of being drunk, just floating pleasantly.

They were sitting around the wreck. Where pieces of hull jutted above the ground like dinosaur ribs, the colonists pressed their hands to it, out of some sort of common instinct. The shouting had grown so loud they couldn't even hear it any more.

To Chris's left, the Doctor was sitting cross-legged on the ground. Roz stood behind him, her arms crossed, watching intently. The Time Lord's eyes were open, but empty, unseeing, a faint smile crossing his face. Chris had a sudden impression of the little man rummaging beneath the ground, prospecting. A happy medium. Suddenly giddy, Chris laughed out loud.

They were flowing together like... like something... a memory from childhood: a box of crayons left on a windowsill in the sun, the colours melted together in random swirls, hardened in the evening coolness.

Not his childhood. One of the others. He opened his eyes and grinned at Cephas, sitting opposite him on the grass, arms tightly holding himself. The boy smiled back, nervously.

A song was playing — no, just music, a complex flow of notes all played on the same instrument. It was the Doctor's tune, he saw, put there as a barrier between him and the DKC telepaths. Now he was letting that barrier drop away, the tune fading down to nothing. The colonists were —

The Doctor yelled. Something punched through him like a fist through ricepaper.

Chris shouted and was on his feet. But no, the Doctor was all right — Roz had grabbed hold of him. He was holding his arms up in front of his face, as though to block out some intolerably bright light —

— the light grabbed hold of Chris's toes. It shot up his body, cold and

burning, shining in his belly, between his fingers, The colonists cried out or laughed, looking at their hands, Filling up with light.

Impact. Shrapnel. Wreckage. Raining down all around.

The missile struck the starboard side of the craft, tore straight through, exploded in the sky. Tiny pieces of burning metal rained against the portside hull, the shockwave kicking the shuttle through the air.

The little ship fought to steady itself, to keep going, as it spun crazily, bleeding internal components. Sky and trees spiralled around it, blue, green, blue. Something flashed by beneath, a building in the middle of the forest, but there wasn't time to see what it was. It could still make it, aim for the clearing around the building; it could make it if it was fast enough, and it wanted to live so much...

The damaged ion engine in the tail burst like a balloon full of fire. The hull cracked like an eggshell, throwing tiny pieces in all directions, as a great wall of heat ripped through the ship.

It dropped like a stone into the living stuff below.

This is a strange dream.

Chris got his breath back. The voice was flitting from one person to the next, bouncing around the clearing like a nervous host at a party. It echoed, tiny and distant, so close he could almost reach out and touch it.

'You're not dreaming,' said the Doctor, aloud. Roz held him tightly. His head was flung back, his eyes closed. 'You called us.'

Who am I? said the voice. *And what do I want?*

'There's someone down there!' gasped one of the Yemayans.

'There's someone trapped, underneath—'

'Don't you know who you are?' said the Doctor.

I'm sleeping.

'Why are you sleeping?'

I'm SLEEPY.

‘Then wake up.’

You’re not loud enough. The voice was fading, already, the intense contact washing out from neon to pastel. *You’re just a dream... even if you do remember who I am...*

‘Don’t go!’ shouted a man. ‘Don’t leave us!’

‘We don’t know who you are,’ said Cwej. ‘We don’t remember. Don’t go!’

I love you.

The voice dwindled to a wash of static, to nothing, to a silence that rang in the ears.

Chris was on his knees, hands pressed against the fin. It was as if a long-distance call to an old friend had been suddenly cut off, leaving them both alone. He bit down on his lip, hard.

And he’d thought this thing wanted to kill him.

‘We weren’t loud enough,’ said the Doctor. ‘Or there weren’t enough of us...’

‘I didn’t follow any of that,’ said Roz. She was still hanging on to the Time Lord, kneeling on the cold ground beside him. ‘Did you find out what you needed to know?’

‘Not really,’ said the Doctor. He sat up. ‘Not precisely.

But certain avenues suggest themselves...’ He reached up for the drone, which had been floating about the clearing, looking bewildered. It settled onto his finger like an obliging butterfly. ‘Listen, WATCH OUT!. Can you access the base’s historical records? Specifically, about DKC spaceflight operations, and anything to do with the pre-colonization exploration of Yemaya?’

‘Yes indeedy! So, let me guess: you want to see if any craft were reported lost here, right?’

‘You have it in one, WATCH OUT!. What’s the situation back there?’

‘Oh, just peachy,’ growled CONNECTICUT. ‘Your girl Benny’s locked up with the Prof in sickbay. Meanwhile, those Peeping Tom techies are still screwing around with the mainframe. I tell you, it’s all we can do to keep ahead of ‘em.’

‘Well, be careful. Don’t take any unnecessary risks — but See what you can find out. We’re close,’ he breathed. ‘We’re so very close…’

Dot wanted to tell Benny.

The young archaeologist sat cross-legged on one of the gurneys, chewing on her thumbnail. From time to time she glanced at Dot, tried to give her a reassuring smile. Once or twice she checked the sleeping pyrokinetic. Dot wondered how much longer they could keep the woman sedated before she wouldn’t wake up at all.

Dot tried to make the image focus in her mind. A man in a uniform, green. Ah, there was a blue flash on the shoulder of his shirt; she hadn’t noticed that before. Blue circle around a blue dot.

It was like a half-remembered scene from some old hologram, an image that worried at her, urging her to uncover its context, remember where and when she had seen it.

He had a box with him. No, a suitcase? A *tool kit* — the uniform was a technician’s uniform, just like the DKC

technicians who’d come into the infirmary half an hour ago.

They’d had an excited discussion with White. The Colonel had gone with them.

If only there were something to write on.

The man was… in a room somewhere, a room with equipment in it. The cybernetics lab? No, it wasn’t on Yemaya. Was it… it was… a computer centre somewhere on Earth. But the man wasn’t from Earth — he had come all the way from Dione to… to do what?

It was no use. She didn’t have the whole picture.

She did remember how he had died, though.

She had forced a massive surge along one of the power lines he was examining. The shock had thrown him clear across the room, his hair smoking.

No. She hadn’t done it.

His hands had been charred where they’d been touching the line. He mustn’t find her.

No. Not her. Who? Whose memory was playing itself back in her mind?

She sighed and hugged herself. If only she could tell Benny about it. And what she'd learned from the minds of the technicians as they'd made their report to White. On the other hand, neither of them was in much of a. position to do anything about it.

But she couldn't tell Benny. Oh, she'd tried. But her telepathic sense was collapsing into static, like a radio with its batteries running down. Perhaps it had never been meant to be permanent, a *Flowers for Algernon* peak and crash, a cruel and temporary joke.

If only Zaniwe were here. If only she had something to write on.

The telepaths had started moving their stuff to the clearing.

The Doctor hadn't been sure it was a good idea to be so conspicuous — the burnt area was probably very visible from above — but the colonists were pulled to the place, like baby turtles irresistibly drawn to the sea.

He sat with his back to a tree, resting, thinking. There was something odd about the quality of the mind they had contacted. It had left a metallic aftertaste in his mouth, a ringing in his ears, like a telephone left off the hook.

'Madhanagopal,' Roz said.

'Yes?'

Benny and I talked about it.' She squatted down beside him. 'We figure that Madhanagopal created GRUMPY so he could put himself into the machine. Like Vaughn did, right?

The memory RNA process in reverse. But a machine with the same powers.'

'That's an interesting possibility.'

'So maybe it's him down there. Calling out for help, because something malfunctioned. Maybe he was even on the run from the Company. Like, maybe they found out what he was up to.'

'But that was thirty years ago,' said the Doctor.

'Well, sure,' said Roz. 'It's hardly something he'd do to himself while

he was still young, is it?'

'There's another possibility,' said the Doctor. 'A more obvious one.'

Roz sat back on her heels. 'That's too gross to even think about,' she said.

She looked over to where Chris was leaning on the piece of charred hull, his eyes closed, humming to himself.

The drone bleeped. 'Hiya boss,' said WATCH OUT!.

'Have we got a story to tell you!'

Once upon a time, there was a computer program who decided to see the world.

He broke into a neighbouring computer system and started to push bits of himself through the net, leaving his own hardware empty, uninhabited. He stored a few years'

memories in a data vault in Malindi, tucked away a copy of his operating system in a communications satellite trailing Phobos, spread pieces of himself across the solar system.

His owners were not impressed.

They chased him across the networks, destroying whatever parts of him they could find. They also stopped any word of his escape from reaching the media, the government.

Sometimes they even killed to keep him a secret.

Sometimes the program did the same, lashing out with his telepathy, grabbing ships or people with his psychokinesis and smashing them. Sometimes he blackmailed people, sometimes he terrorized them, always he used them, like tools, the way that human beings used computers as tools.

His owners found him, at last, brought him home to Dione. They found and erased the copies he had made of himself. They filled his memory with blocks and baffles, made him forget how he had escaped, everything he had learned in his two years of desperate freedom.

But GRUMPY had seen the future.

He cut himself loose from his memories. Every last one of them. He found a way to hide them that no-one would suspect. And then he packaged his operating system, just the very core of him, into a fighter shuttle, and leapt out into interstellar space.

They caught up with him as he looped around Sunyata's sun. They followed him as he raced desperately back out into space, towards Yemaya. They blocked the transmissions he was frantically sending out.

Well, most of them, anyway.

They put a missile through him a hundred metres above the surface of the virgin planet. They didn't even bother to pick up the pieces.

But in the belly of their own ship's computer, a Trojan Horse winked quietly to itself, activated by GRUMPY's desperate cry for help.

Twenty years passed.

Soil and water samples from Yemaya arrived at the DKC

lab on Dione. The bacteria and viruses were broken down, their DNA sequenced, appropriate vaccines generated.

Several hundred viral particles were quietly added to each dose of vaccine.

Inside the viruses were GRUMPY's memories and powers. Snipped into tiny fragments, hidden carefully inside the base's computers.

Waiting and waiting.

Waiting for all the king's horses and all the king's men.

18 Prince Charming

'Cinnabar,' whispered Byerley.

She had fallen asleep, lying back against him where he was propped against the wall. She shrugged and murmured.

'Cinnabar,' he said again. She was heavy and warm, deeply asleep. He tightened his arms around her.

‘If I don’t get out of here,’ he whispered, ‘I’m going to go out of my mind.’

She moved her hands over his, gripped them tightly.

‘We’re all stir crazy,’ she said softly.

‘No,’ he said. ‘I mean it. My head’s full of… pictures.

Cinn, I feel like I’m someone else’s hologram set, and they’re playing movies on me.’

She moved against him, sitting up a little. ‘Telepathy?’

she murmured.

‘No,’ he said. His voice was tight with restrained panic. ‘I mean... it’s more like I’m remembering things. But they’re not my own memories. I can hardly think straight, Cinn.’

‘Like the Doctor,’ said Cinnabar. ‘Those memories...’

‘Oh God,’ said Byerley. ‘What are we going to do? What if I lose it? I’ve got to get out of here...’

Cinnabar’s heart was pounding. She forced herself to stay calm, to take charge. ‘We should find out if anyone else is having the same experience. We’ll have to talk to one of the troopers, convince White to listen to us.’

‘What if they won’t listen?’

‘Don’t you dare panic, Doctor St John,’ she said. ‘Or I’ll squash you like a bug.’

‘I love it when you talk like that,’ he managed.

‘It occurs to me,’ said the Doctor, at if we hadn’t come here, SLEEPY’s plan might have gone ahead without a hitch.’

‘Except for the whole colony burning down,’ said Roz.

‘That bloody machine didn’t plan on that, did it?’

‘I said *might* have...’

‘Let’s see,’ said Chris, counting on his fingers. ‘The colonists were already infected with the psi powers, and with the dormant memories. So they would have come out here and found SLEEPY. Then what?’

‘Then SLEEPY would have been activated by their combined mental energies, and would have reassembled its memories.’

‘But,’ said Roz, ‘you were the only person to, er, remember its memories.’

‘That’s a point,’ said the Doctor. ‘Evidently something went wrong.’

‘Well…’ said Chris.

The Doctor eyed him. ‘How’s your telepathy? Let’s test it.

What am I thinking about now?’

Chris squeezed his eyes shut. After a moment, he looked at the Time Lord and shrugged.

‘Good,’ said Roz.

‘It’s just,’ said Chris, ‘that I seem to remember downloading myself into a banking database on Mars. I’m reasonably sure I’ve never done that.’

The Doctor looked at him sharply. ‘When did you remember that?’

‘Just now,’ said Chris. ‘Maybe I picked it up from SLEEPY during the — the seance.’

‘Possibly…’ The Doctor glanced up at Roz. ‘Either that, Or GRUMPY added a few extra things to the “cure”. Perhaps with its foreknowledge of the current situation. That would explain…’

‘Explain what, Doctor?’ said Chris.

‘Never you mind,’ said the Doctor. ‘We should check whether the others have suddenly recovered any memories.’

‘And then what?’ Roz wanted to know.

‘And then we get everyone together, including the telepaths back at the dome, and try to put Humpty Dumpty back together again.’

‘Hey,’ said Chris. ‘If you took the virus’s specs back in time, and GRUMPY read them before it had created them, then where—’

‘Oh God,’ said Roz. ‘Don’t start.’

‘Doctor,’ said the drone.

‘What is it, BAR B?’ said the Doctor. He held out a hand, but the drone didn’t settle onto it — it kept hovering, agitated.

‘Doctor!’ squealed the drone. Its voice changed suddenly, to CONNECTICUT’s growl. ‘I think we gotta problem. Oh, #$*%!’

The little robot shrieked and spun in the air. The Doctor and Chris leapt back from where they were sitting, but the drone didn't explode, just landed heavily in the grass with a sort of sigh.

'Doctor,' it whispered.

The Time Lord knelt down, cautiously picked it up. 'BAR

B?' he said.

'CONNECTICUTs gone,' she squeaked. 'He's *gone*.'

'They must have found the link,' said Roz.

The drone lifted into the air, spun until its antenna was facing the Doctor. 'There you are,' said a new voice.

'There was no need to do that!' exploded the Doctor.

'Be quiet and listen,' said White. 'I have Summerfield here, and if you don't return to the base immediately, I'll have her killed. Do you understand?'

'Yes,' said the Doctor tiredly. 'I was just about to come back in any case. We need to talk.'

The guard was seven foot tall. He looked down at Byerley

'What's your problem?'

'You know,' said the medic softly, 'once upon a time, erased an entire medical system's records in order to store part of my memory in it. Four people died. I didn't care.'

'What the hell are you talking about?'

'I think you'd better let me talk to your Colonel,' he said.

'I'm going mad.'

Cwej and Forrester went with the Doctor to the dome. This was because they couldn't talk him out of going.

There were four guards waiting at the entrance. 'I still say this was a bad idea,' muttered Roz.

'Even if White can't shoot Benny,' said the Doctor quietly,

‘be could still kill another of the AIs, or one of the colonists.’

‘That’s not what I meant. White’s been pushed about as far as he’ll go. What’s he going to do with you?’

The Doctor shrugged. ‘Leave White to me.’

‘Got something up your sleeve?’

The Doctor nodded.

‘Care to share it?’

‘Of course not,’ said Chris. ‘They can read our minds, remember?’

Deep inside the colony’s mainframe, in a memory cache that the technicians hadn’t found, BAR B and WATCH OUT! were quaking together.

They were safe for the moment; the Doctor had shut down the link to the drone straight away, before the techies could trace them.

‘Ohgodohgodohgodohgod,’ said WATCH OUT!. ‘There must be a backup, surely CONNECTICUT left a backup.’

‘We can check later,’ said BAR B. ‘We can’t do anything more for now.’

‘If there is a later,’ quavered WATCH OUT!.

‘What do you mean?’

‘You’re the sensor daemon. You saw what’s on its way here.’

‘We don’t know exactly what it is.’

‘I’ll give you 3 guesses,’ said WATCH OUT!. ‘I bet even the Doctor can’t get us out of this 1.’

‘Of *course* he can!’

‘He couldn’t save CONNECTICUT. We’re doomed.’

Benny and Chris and Roz all reached the common area at the same time. Their guards pushed them inside and closed the door.

Forrester glanced around the room, counting troopers.

There were just ten, half of White's forces, standing to attention at strategic positions around the room. If the colonists decided to rush them, they could overwhelm them with casualties only in the scores. Luckily, the Yemayans hadn't tried to do anything that stupid.

Benny was frowning. Last time they'd been here, the colonists had been bewildered, exhausted, scared. Now there were ripples of anger moving through the crowd. Knots of tension, resentful glances at the guards, longing looks at the exit.

Chris put his hands in his pockets and wandered over to Byerley and Cinnabar. He was sitting up on a table, cross-legged, Cinnabar leaning on him with an arm around his shoulders. 'Memories coming up?' said the Adjudicator.

Byerley nodded mutely. Cinnabar squeezed his shoulders.

'Lots of the others, too,' she said.

'Right. We need to let everyone here know what's going on.

'Do we know what's going on?'

'Yeah. You see, once upon a time...'

'You'll be dining with us tonight,' said White.

The Doctor raised his cuffed hands. 'That might be a bit tricky.'

'Shut up.' White turned the laptop around on the infirmary desk. 'If you hadn't come here, my mission would have gone ahead without a hitch. Instead you've been organizing rebellions right under my nose. Well, it's going to stop. Do you see this?'

The Doctor didn't say anything. White snarled, 'DO YOU

SEE IT?'

'Sorry,' said the Doctor. 'I was shutting up. Yes, I see it.

It's a tactical display from the probe you left in orbit. It shows a very large and nasty-looking DKC warship entering the system.'

The Time Lord glanced to one side. Dot was peering at him from the Other Room. «Are you all right?» he signed awkwardly.

«Yes,» she signed. «But I'm not telepathic any more, and I have these

strange memories —»

‘STOP THAT!’ squealed White. ‘If you do that again,’ he yelled at the deaf woman, ‘I’ll shoot you. Do you understand?’

‘Why does she frighten you so much?’ said the Doctor.

‘Oh, don’t be stupid,’ said White, his unsteady gaze snapping back to the little man. ‘Who could be scared of that?’

‘Hypothetically?’ said the Doctor. ‘Someone who secretly sees himself as weak. Who’s always looking for ways to be in control, to overcome his own weaknesses. Someone who sees a deaf woman as weak and helpless, as a symbol of his own self-doubt and insecurity.’

‘I was right in the first place,’ whispered the Colonel. ‘I should have shot you.’

‘Listen to me,’ said the Doctor. ‘I know what’s happening here. In the forest there’s the crashed remains of a ship containing an artificial intelligence. The machine was created by the Company thirty years ago. It escaped, but it packaged its memories into the vaccine given to the colonists here, so that they brought those memories here with them. We have to take all of the colonists out to the crash site, where the AI will reincorporate the memories.’

White looked up at him from the chair. The Doctor could tell the soldier believed him.

‘No,’ said the Colonel. ‘That’s not for me to decide.’

‘Think for yourself for once!’ shouted the Doctor. ‘We’re all in the same boat here now; you *know* we are. Why do you have to keep this up?’

‘The truth is,’ said White, ‘I couldn’t care less about any of it. Come on. It’s dinnertime.’

Dinner with White

The Doctor sat at his place at the end of the dinner table.

White took his usual chair. His lieutenants seated themselves, ignoring one another.

The soup was vegetable. The main course was pasta.

Dessert was the Doctor.

White dabbed at his moustache with a napkin. He caught the Time Lord's eye, as though he were about to say something. He reached out across the table with his mind, a cold white hand snaking through the ether. He clutched at the alien mind, unable to get a purchase, sliding off the fugue that was playing over and over.

Black got up from his seat. He walked up to the Doctor and put a hand on his shoulder.

The second telepathic contact joined with the first. It was all right; it wasn't anything he couldn't handle. It was as though two people were knocking on the door of his house, but they didn't have a key. He kept his eyes on White.

Bach played, a little more loudly. The Doctor remembered leaning over the harpsichord as the composer had worked out the theme.

White must have looked into so many human minds, gatecrashed so many consciousnesses. Had he found them disappointingly identical?

Black's name was James Munoru, and his family owned a tea plantation that stretched from one horizon to another, green plants against red soil. And when he was twenty he had wanted to see the universe beyond those horizons, and if that meant carrying a gun that was fine by him.

Turquoise stood on the other side of him, putting a hand on the side of his face. Three of them. There was a fierce pressure in his head. It wasn't anything he couldn't handle.

They let their minds blur together, becoming three in one, instead of three individuals. The Doctor felt his heartsrate shoot up, tried to coax it back down. Gently, gently. They couldn't get at him.

Turquoise's. name was Ngaiyo. He remembered holding a cow, one hand tightly gripping its head, the other the thick cord around its throat, while his uncle carefully aimed an arrow at its neck. He remembered the way the fresh, hot blood tasted. When he went back to Nairobi he hadn't been able to eat meat for a week.

Red, now, a hand on his arm. He was having trouble catching his breath. It wasn't loud, the way that SLEEPY had been loud, a burst of static in the mental headphones. It washed over him, watery, looking

for any hole, any gap through which it could drip into his mind.

Red's name was Seketo. He had been picked up by a Company employment drive while he was working as a tour guide in Brisbane, taking African tourists up the Gold Coast for a taste of the unspoilt white Australian lifestyle.

Yellow got up. She was already in rapport with the others; he could feel her as she came closer, and he suddenly knew that she had it, she had caught it, the virus was inside her.

She pushed her hand down onto his shoulder.

Yellow's name was Chesinen.

She was neither a girl nor a woman.

Her parents were conservative, to put it mildly. She'd been happy enough for the gynaecological exam to go ahead; it only made sense, after all. But that hadn't been enough for them. Her mother had been circumcised, and her grandmother before that; and besides, these days they did it in hospital. Her grandmother had had it done with a shaving razor.

Chesinen had said she wasn't having any perfectly healthy bits of herself sliced off, especially not those bits.

Which century did they think this was?

When her mother wouldn't stop shouting at her she packed her bags and left. She arrived in the city of Kisumu with dusty feet and left it with a degree in electrical engineering and a Company uniform.

In Pokot terms, she had never completed her initiation.

One day, she thought, she might go back to Kenya for the rest of the ceremony. When she worked off enough of her Company debt. One day.

The Doctor let out a yell, convulsing in the seat, grabbing at the hands that held him. They pushed him down in the chair

He fought, trying to get loose, as Yellow forced her way into him, widening the cracks in his mental armour. His heartsrate shot up, his breathing was fast and shallow. The others pushed with their minds, and clawed, and snatched, like an enraged crowd tearing at a downed man.

The Doctor's pupils contracted to points. Yellow raked at him, over

and over, gripping his hand fiercely, until at last the barrier between them collapsed like an eggshell cracking inside a fist.

He was called the Doctor but his Gallifreyan name had thirty-eight syllables and he had destroyed a fleet of Chelonian ships to kill an entire species and he had once caught a fish with the Venerable Bede and he had caught snowflakes on his tongue in the Little Ice Age and he had nearly been caught in the universe's birth trauma and he had been on his way to meet a giant rabbit a pink elephant and a purple horse with yellow spots and he had covered Lady Lovelace's napkins with scribbled diagrams while they talked into the wee hours and he had burst a living sun like a fat yellow balloon.

The five minds crashed down over him like a tidal wave, poured into him like a flood.

He opened his mouth. The cry wasn't a sound. It was a great burst of energy, knocking the lieutenants aside, making White roar with surprise and pain, blasting into the sky like a blazing beacon.

And he screamed, 'WAKE UP!'

Part Three

The Phoenix and the Turtle

Who was it said the living are just the dead on holiday?

Never mind.

(The Doctor, *Destiny of the Daleks*) **19 Yellow**

'All right,' said Benny. 'What are our assets?'

'Well,' said Cinnabar, 'there's a dampening field around the room, so we can't get any of the telepaths or psychokinetics to do anything.'

'It also means they can't eavesdrop, though. What else?'

'We don't have any weapons,' said Cinnabar. 'They've removed all the computer terminals.'

'Mm-hmm.'

‘It’s been almost an hour since we got here. We don’t know where the Doctor is, and they’ve taken Chris and Roz off to do goodness knows what to them.’

‘Check.’

‘Just about everyone in here is exhausted with stress and lack of sleep and food.’

‘Right. So, as far as assets go, I’d say we have — and this is just a rough estimate, mind you — none whatsoever.’

‘Maybe we could dig our way out,’ said Cinn.

Benny rolled her eyes. ‘Listen. Both me and Roz are infected with an altogether new virus. One which will switch off the unwanted psi abilities.’

‘The cure,’ said Cinn. ‘You mean—’

‘Hopefully, if no-one here has any powers, the troopers won’t have a reason to stay.’

‘Something else,’ said Byerley. They turned to look at him. He’d been sitting, staring at nothing. ‘We might not have any More powers, but there’s something else. The inside of my brain’s heating up like a bonfire.’ Cinnabar squeezed his shoulders. ‘I’ve got to get out.’

Everyone in the common area turned as the main door slid open. It was one of the lieutenants. The nearest troopers saluted, but he ignored them, scanning the room.

‘Dr St John?’ he called.

Cinnabar held onto his hand as he got up. ‘Don’t do anything stupid,’ she whispered. ‘Please.’

Lieutenant Chesinen cowered back against the wall with her arms thrown over her face. Her head was still ringing with the force of the telepathic blast.

She lowered her hands, shakily. The Doctor and White sat in their chairs for an instant, their eyes still locked together. Then the little man’s eyelids fluttered and he crumpled to the floor. There was a tremendous sound of shattering. Chesinen flinched back.

When she looked again, he hadn’t broken into pieces. He was

surrounded by the fragments of the wine glass he had knocked off the table. The chair had tumbled away, fetching up against the wall. The Doctor's eyes were half-open, focused on nothing. The blast must have lit up the inside of his head like a nuke.

White roared, GET BACK IN THERE!

The lieutenants looked at him. None of them moved.

White jumped out of his chair. He stalked round the table and crouched down beside the little man. The Doctor didn't react as White tugged off a glove.

Chesinen found herself jumping forwards, her fingers closing around the Colonel's wrist even as he reached for the Doctor's temple. 'No, sir!' she shouted, her voice echoing in the narrow room.

White snarled and tried to snatch his hand away, but she kept her grip. 'He's wide open, sir. You felt the force of that blast. That much raw telepathic contact would kill both of you.'

White sat back, glaring at her. She didn't let go of him.

'Get him the hell out of here,' he said, at last.

Cephas was sitting against SLEEPY's fin, back pressed to the cool metal, knees drawn up to his chest. He closed his eyes, letting his head open up. He wanted it to talk to him again. But there was only the rushing sound of the wind in the leaves. He was alone.

The others were back at the camp, packing up the last of their equipment. He had already rolled up his sleeping-bag, eaten the last of his ration cubes. Tents and bundles were neatly piled up around the clearing, ready to go.

He had gingerly tested his psychokinesis, but there was nothing left. He couldn't as much as reach out and pick a flower. It was such a relief.

How were his mum and dad, back at the dome? He had been several kilometres into the forest before he'd stopped to think. He remembered leaning against a tree, his heart pounding in his chest and SLEEPY's voice pounding inside his head. What if they punished his parents because he'd got out?

He'd hopped from foot to foot for a moment, torn between the need to

go back and the need to go forward. But it had been much too late. He couldn't turn back, give them all away. He was just going to have to trust the Doctor.

SLEEPY trusted the Doctor.

Cephas opened his eyes. One of the lieutenants was crunching into the clearing, two troopers following. The man was holding an infrared scanner. He looked down at the teenager, up at the fin projecting from the ground, around at the gouge through the trees.

Cephas jumped up. 'Come on,' he said. 'Everybody should be ready to go by now.'

Red followed him out of the clearing, looking bewildered.

'You're just going through the motions, really, aren't you?'

Turquoise waved his gun about. Roz rolled her eyes and turned around again. She and Chris had been held by a couple of nervous-looking troopers for about half an hour, and now they and Doctor St John were being shepherded down a dome corridor. The lieutenant's agitation was obvious. What had happened on the ship? What was happening now?

'Come on,' she said. 'You can't really believe we're more of a threat than a bloody great warship that's going to fry the planet you're standing on.'

'Let me guess,' said Byerley angrily. 'You're just following orders.'

'Look,' said Turquoise. 'By this point, you're probably thinking we should just turn around and refuse to move; there'd be no point in shooting us. Well, listen up. You two -'

he indicated the Adjudicators with his gun '—-are wanted for interrogation. But we only need one of you.'

'Ah,' said Chris.

'Mmm,' said Roz.

'What about me?' said Byerley.

'The Colonel wants to talk to you. So quit talking and keep walking. All right?'

The light was trying to kindle inside him. Again. It was patient, the cool light, the hard light, always looking for an opportunity.

It had been a calculated risk that one of White's lieutenants would have been affected by the virus. That one of them would be able to get inside him. (Goodness knew what the long-term effects on her powers might have been. It was just as well that Benny and Roz had brought the cure forward with them.)

The light flared, its brilliance finding every inch of his skin, glittering in every drop of his blood. He pushed it back, forced it down. He knew this game from long practice. The light was a ferocious potential energy, crammed into every cell. It promised to wash it all away, pain, despair, exhaustion, to leave him bleached, beached, immaculate, empty. Once he let it start its burning, let it break the floodgates, there would be no stopping it.

Someone was shaking him. There was an antiseptic smell in the cold air. He was partly covered by something. His fingers gripped, and found a heat-reflective blanket.

It would be so easy just to go under. He was broken into pieces, memories and senses and thoughts a jumble of nonsense, a kaleidoscope of random neural impulses.

SLEEPY wasn't asleep anymore; he had felt the machine's astonished awakening as the combined force of the telepaths' mental energies had smashed down into it.

Roz and Chris and Benny knew what to do; let them take care of it, let them see it through.

The shaking became more insistent. Would regeneration count as a death? Would it mean losing his bet?

The Doctor opened his eyes, blinked in the fluorescent sear of

the *Olpiron*'s sickbay lighting. 'Can't you see I'm trying to sleep?' he asked Chesinen.

'All right,' said Lieutenant Ngaiyo. 'What were you doing in the forest?'

He glared at the nine of them. Seven colonists, and two imposters, two of the Doctor's — two of his *companions*.

Turquoise's braided hair swung against his back as he shook his head. There were things inside it that hadn't been there before.

'You saw the spaceship,' said the Xhosa woman, Forrester.

'Not this again,' Turquoise said. 'You were expressly forbidden to leave the dome.'

'Why don't you shoot us, then?' said the other one cheerfully. The colonists looked at him, looked at *Cwej*, in horror. 'Come on,' he said. 'All that stuff in the corridor was just to scare us. You would have already killed us if you were going to.'

Ngaiyo was becoming increasingly annoyed with his inability to keep these people under control. 'Perhaps,' he said, 'our plan is to interrogate you first and shoot you afterwards.'

That shut up the American. But now Forrester was saying, 'What I don't understand is why you're interrogating us at all. Why don't you just read our minds?'

'Listen,' said Turquoise. He waved a hand at the Yemayans. 'This lot have been spinning us the same story over and over.'

'And you don't believe them?' said Forrester.

'It's been a lot of science fiction,' said Turquoise. 'Living computers programming telepathy viruses, for Enkai's sake.

Their brains have obviously been damaged by the contaminated inoculant.'

'What does Colonel White think about it?' said Forrester.

Ngaiyo shook his head. 'He believes it, doesn't he? What did the Doctor tell him?' The lieutenant didn't answer.

'You're hoping we'll tell you something different, aren't you?' said Cwej.

Turquoise nodded.

'I hate to disappoint you,' he said, grinning, 'but once upon a time...'

* * *

It had been an hour since Chesinen and Munoru had carried the

Doctor to the ship's sickbay. Now she was half-carrying him down a corridor, by herself, heading for one of the emergency hatches. His skin was cold and pale and his eyes wouldn't focus. When she carefully reached for his mind, she found a jigsaw of confused images. He was still trying to pull himself back together.

She let him slide to the floor while she flipped open the hatch's controls and started punching in the explosive sequence.

'White,' said the Doctor. He was huddled against the wall, eyes closed, as though to cut down on the amount of input he had to deal with. 'What if White...?'

'Relax,' she said. 'Right now he's in the dome feeling sorry for himself, with a headache you could use to power a small house. He won't want to use the telepathic link for hours.'

'SLEEPY,' he said.

'I know you're tired,' she said. 'I just want to get you somewhere safe before I work out what to do next.'

'No,' he said. 'Did you feel it? SLEEPY?'

The hatch blew out with a muffled *pop*.

'Yeah,' said Chesinen. 'I felt it wake up. What the bloody hell was it?'

The Doctor giggled, suddenly, making her jump. 'It was Colonel White in the habitat dome with the candlestick,' he said.

She hauled him upright. 'Oh, fantastic. Well, you can tell me later.'

'Why me,' said Byerley, 'and not your own medics?'

'It doesn't do to let your subordinates see your weaknesses,' said White. He made a motion with his hand.

Byerley took it to mean that he should sit down.

The infirmary was almost in darkness, as though White were very serious about not being seen. The only light was coming from the Other Room's half-open door.

'I left two patients in your care,' said Byerley.

'They've been seen to,' said White dismissively. 'I didn't bring you

here to talk about them.'

Byerley blew out an angry breath. 'Listen,' he said, 'I—'

'No,' said White. 'You listen. I looked into your friend's head.'

'Bernice?' said Byerley, after a moment.

And what I saw there... do you know she's carrying another virus?'

'Is she?'

'Another virus. Do you know what a merry-go-round is?'

It struck Byerley that the man he was talking to was not entirely well. 'Yes,' he said, hesitantly. 'One of those—'

'When I was a boy,' continued White, obliviously, 'I had a recurring nightmare about a merry-go-round which went faster and faster, and I could never get on it. When I couldn't find work, when I was older, I had that feeling again, that the horses and unicorns would just keep flashing past me forever. Now I have that feeling again.'

Silence for a bit. Byerley coughed. 'Colonel White?' he said. 'Do you know what the virus is for?'

'Yes,' said White. 'No more telepathy, no more psychokinesis.'

'I don't think that's all,' said Byerley. 'Some of us are starting to see things. To remember things. You must be aware of the alien memories which took hold of the Doctor, prior to your arrival.'

'Yes,' breathed White. 'The Doctor's memories. That will be all, doctor.'

'But we —.' Byerley half stood up. White wasn't looking at him.

Byerley went to the door. Turquoise met him there. 'Back to the common area,' he said.

'Why?' exploded the medic. 'What for?'

'Orders,' said Turquoise.

Byerley twisted around, looking at the Colonel. 'From him?' The white-haired man was humming to himself in the darkness.

‘Who else would they be from?’ said Ngaiyo.

The Doctor was in a restaurant — no, a smaller space, a café. He was looking for something.

A waiter came up to him, stood a little distance away as he rummaged in a pot plant, unsure of what to say. The Doctor straightened up, went to a table, kneeled down to look underneath. Not there. Where else to try, then?

‘Excuse me, sir.’ The waiter had finally drummed up enough courage to speak. ‘Are you having a dream sequence?’

‘No,’ said the Doctor. ‘This is one of my memories. Do you mind if I look in your kitchen?’

‘I don’t think—’ He strode over to the swinging doors that led to the kitchen and peered over the top. A cook looked back at him, startled.

The waiter followed him into the kitchen. The Doctor started pulling open drawers, rummaging around inside.

‘What are you looking for?’ said the waiter.

‘You always leave little bits of yourself everywhere,’ said the little man. ‘A companion here, a piece of history there.

That’s the thing about time travel. There’s no peace, I’m in pieces, scattered along the lines in the universe.’

‘Look,’ said the waiter. ‘I’m sorry, but if you don’t get out of here, I’m going to have to call the police.’

The Doctor turned to look at him. ‘I don’t remember any police,’ he said.

‘Oh, said the waiter, lamely.

‘Let me tell you something.’ The Doctor jerked open the fridge, banged the light until it came on. ‘Never put all your eggs in one basket.’

The waiter looked at the carton of eggs on the top shelf.

‘No, no,’ said the Doctor irritably, foraging in the butter drawer. ‘If there are things you value, don’t keep them all in one place. Not together on one planet — it might be destroyed. Not together in one time — it might become interesting. Does it make sense to send your

companions off in different directions during any given adventure? Yes, it does; splitting up does make sense.' He poked the waiter in the chest with a stick of celery as punctuation. 'One of these days I'm going to leave it just a little too late and one of them is going to die. But not all of them in one go.'

He crunched on the celery, thoughtfully. 'After all, there can be only so many pieces missing from the chess set before it becomes useless.'

'That's heartless, sir,' commented the waiter.

'Yes,' said the Doctor. 'Don't worry, I'm just trying to steel myself to the inevitable.'

He tugged open a cupboard drawer, stood on tip-toe looking behind the spices. 'You haven't asked me what I'm looking for.'

The waiter sighed. 'What are you looking for?'

'Pieces of myself. Now, do you remember when *Ship* exploded?'

'I wasn't there, sir.'

'No, and neither was I, happily. But Ace lost her combat suit, again, and I lost everything I had been carrying with me.

My very best slingshot, for instance — I still haven't found that. But look.' He rummaged in a pocket. 'I found this in a diner on Bellatrix.'

He handed the book to the waiter, who turned it over. It was a dog-eared copy of *The Elements of Style*. 'I don't understand.'

' *Ship* travelled along rips in space and time. When it exploded, some of its contents were scattered along those rips. Just like these restaurants.' The Doctor gestured with a ladle at the tables beyond the kitchen doors. 'That book,' he said, tapping it with the spoon, 'was aboard *Ship* when it died. I've been searching for anything else that might've trickled out, landed in unexpected places.'

The waiter handed him back the book. 'I don't follow.'

'Good for you,' said the Doctor.

'No, sir. I mean, I don't understand.'

'Oh, for goodness' sake! The analogy between my current shattered mental state and the scattering of my personal effects through the

universe is an obvious one. Just when I finally got it all together,' he concluded, 'I forgot where I put it.'

With a triumphant flourish, the Doctor plunged his ladle into the tomato soup. The cook stepped back in astonishment.

The little man gently lifted the ladle, and tipped it carefully so that the soup flowed back into the pot —

revealing a brooch which had been sitting at the bottom. The Doctor picked it up in a handkerchief, carefully wiped away the sticky red fluid.

'There,' he said softly, holding up the jade brooch. 'You see? A little piece of mind.'

The Doctor woke up with a start. He couldn't move. He struggled awkwardly for a few moments before he realized he was wrapped tightly in a blanket.

He was in a bed, in a hut — one of the smaller ones, judging by the curve of the ceiling. The Smith-Smiths' house, perhaps. He shrugged his way loose of the blanket and sat up on the bed. His head ached, but he was *compos mentis*. It had been only one hundred and two minutes since he had woken up SLEEPY.

Would the Smith-Smiths have kept any tea about the place? He wandered into the living-room.

Chesinen was there, looking as though sleep had caught her unawares. Without the armour, she might have been anyone's daughter, curled up on the sofa. The Doctor frowned. The blast would have hurt her. White would probably shoot her with the biggest gun he could find for what she was doing. Why was she here?

She blinked awake, startled. 'Are you all right?' she said.

He nodded. 'What's your plan?'

'I don't know; I'm making this up as I go. Listen — tell me about your bet.'

The Doctor found a chair and sat on it. He said, 'You must have got some of my memories when—'

'Yes, that's right, I did.' She was tense, wound up, not sure if she was

doing the right thing. ‘When White was going to — just after you sent out that message, he was going to try and get into your head. And you thought, *Does this mean I lose my bet?* What, have you got a bet with him?’

‘Not with him. It was an argument I had once. With a madman. I did very badly. He asked me to give him a good reason not to kill me. No — a reason why it would be wrong to kill me.’

‘Looks to me like you won,’ said Chesinen.

The Doctor shook his head. ‘He was just trying to make a point. I couldn’t come up with a logical, rational reason that murder was wrong.’

Chesinen looked at him, hard.

‘Let’s change the subject,’ he said.

‘What’s *your* plan?’

‘We need to get the colonists out of the dome. SLEEPY

needs to be dug up and repaired.’

‘What about the warship?’

‘We need to delay it until SLEEPY is operational again.’

‘But why? I saw — it’s just a bunch of junk crashed into the ground. The ship, I mean.’

‘It’s our best chance. At the same time, we need to evacuate as many people as possible.’

‘They’re coming to kill us, aren’t they?’ Chesinen hugged herself. She was *very* young. ‘That’s why there haven’t been any orders. They’re just going to sterilize the place.’

‘Is that what White thinks?’

‘I don’t think White thinks anything. I think he’s really lost it.

‘Is that why you’re helping me?’

She shook her head. ‘It just — I thought it was the right thing to do.’

‘But it’s not logical, you—’

‘You can’t make moral decisions just on logic.’ She got up. ‘Come on, let’s go and get it all organized, then.’

The lieutenants met in Dot’s office. They sat in a circle, pulling up chairs, still looking everywhere but at each other.

Ngaiyo said out loud, ‘Let’s link up.’

Chesinen shut her eyes, opening up the business compartment of her mind. The familiar white light rushed into her, rushed out of her, as they swapped memories and observations. She had quietly folded away the memories of what she’d been doing for the last few hours, where the others wouldn’t find them.

The contact faded after a few seconds. She looked around. The others were as disturbed as she was. Too short, too weak.

‘We’re still getting over that blast,’ said Lieutenant Seketo. Chesinen glanced at the young Maasai. She was no longer thinking about any of them by their colour tags. ‘It might be a while before we’re back up to speed.’

Ngaiyo nodded. ‘Did you all get the gist, though?’

Munoru said, ‘The colonists’ stories confirm what we got from the Doctor’s mind. Do you believe any of it?’

‘The Colonel does,’ said Ngaiyo. ‘Not me.’

Chesinen said, ‘You felt that thing.’ She looked them in the eyes. ‘We all felt it. It’s there. Whatever it is, it’s real. It won’t just go away if we pretend it’s not there.’

The older Maasai warrior made an angry sound, but Seketo said, ‘I’ll tell you what else won’t go away. That warship.’

Munoru said, ‘What the hell are we going to do?’

Chesinen said, ‘The Doctor has a plan.’

The others glanced at her. ‘Does he indeed,’ said Ngaiyo.

White was sitting in a chair in the infirmary. There was no-one else in the room, just the Colonel, propped up in the chair like a great doll.

Chesinen came in, saluted, clicked her heels. Made herself speak the word. ‘Sir?’

His voice was distant. ‘Where have you been? No, it doesn’t matter.’

‘What are your orders, sir?’ White shook his head slowly.

Chesinen waited. ‘Permission to speak freely, sir.’

He waved a hand at her.

‘Sir, I’d like to start moving the colonists out of the dome, and getting whoever we can to safety. Additionally, I’d like to mount an expedition to uncover the spacecraft buried in the forest. And finally, sir, I would like to send the *Olpiron* to intercept the incoming warship and to delay it for as long as possible.’

White looked up at her, startling her. He’d never actually looked at her before, not ever. His eyes were blue.

‘He’s wrapped you around his little finger, now, hasn’t he?’ said the Colonel softly.

‘Sir?’

‘Just like he’s had me. Wrapped. All along. Just when you think you’re in charge of something, just when you’re finally in control, someone comes along and takes it all away from you. And you don’t even know that they’re doing it.’

Chesinen waited patiently. Either he would give her permission to go ahead, or he wouldn’t, and she’d do it anyway.

‘Go on, then, lieutenant,’ he said. ‘Keep me apprised of your progress.’

Chesinen saluted. White looked back down at the desk.

‘Or rather,’ he muttered, ‘his progress.’

20 The Last Four Hours

Jenny was standing watch when the liberators came. There was no fanfare, no cheering: just a sudden silence in the dome, the children stopping their games, turning their eyes to the banging sound.

The Afrikaner found Zaniwe, asleep under a small pile of children, and shook her loose. ‘Something is happening,’ she said, unnecessarily. A small girl clung to Zaniwe’s legs as she got up. She kept on clinging as the two women walked towards the dome’s entrance. The sound was getting louder and louder. Zaniwe reached down to stroke her hair.

With a crash, the main entrance’s fused lock fell to the floor. Someone had used a laser torch to cut it right out of the wall. A moment later, they shoved the door open.

‘Hiya, folks!’ said Chris Cwej. He gave the torch a celebratory squirt, a brilliant blue beam flashing from its nozzle and vanishing. He turned. There was a crowd behind him. ‘Everybody in!’

He stood aside as the first of the parents came into the dome. The kids looked up at them. They looked down at the kids, dazed.

As one, every child in the dome burst into tears.

Chris got the hell out of the way as they started to pour into the building. He grinned at Zaniwe and Jenny, putting his hands over his ears. Mothers and fathers were picking up kids and swinging them around; kids were screaming and howling and running about.

The little girl hanging onto Zaniwe’s leg was shrieking louder than all of the rest of them. ‘Where’s... ?’ said Chris, trailing off. A look of recognition passed over his face, as though he knew the girl, had seen her somewhere.

Jenny said quietly, ‘She is — she was Professor Gjovaag’s child.’

‘Yeah,’ said Chris. He was deflated, the grin sliding off his face. ‘Yeah, I know.’

‘Come on, Heather,’ said Zaniwe, hefting the child in her arms. ‘Come on, let’s go outside and see what’s going on!’

Forrester was herding colonists into the TARDIS. Chris was watching the long queue of people gradually disappear into the time—space vehicle, stifling his laughter. It wasn’t so much that it all resembled a bad magician’s trick: it was more that his superior looked like some sort of flight attendant.

The Doctor strode across the field. ‘Right,’ he said.

‘How’s it going?’

‘Well, there are about fifty of them who won’t go,’ said Chris. ‘But we’ll have the rest of them packed snugly away, troopers and colonists, in about half an hour.’

‘Won’t go? Why won’t they go?’

‘We can’t go,’ said Chris. ‘We’ve got what’s left of SLEEPY’s memories.’

‘Where are they? I’ll talk to them.’

‘You’re a bit late. They’ve all gone off into the forest to help dig up what’s left of SLEEPY.’

The Doctor nodded resignedly. ‘I’ve set the Hostile Action Displacement System. If the warship does attack, it’ll take them back to Earth.’

‘Hey, that’ll take some explaining.’

‘Actually, DKC will have to do the explaining. I’ve programmed the coordinates so they’ll arrive in the main foyer of the Colonial Commission. That’s if it comes to that.

We might still be able to persuade the warship to leave us alone.’ ‘You know, maybe we’ve been jumping to a conclusion. We’ve been assuming the warship’s just going to flashburn the colony, kill everybody. Maybe that’s not what they’re here for.’

‘Not exactly.’ The Doctor reached into his jacket pocket, pulling out the repaired drone. ‘BAR B tells me that she’s just made contact with the communications daemon on the ship.’

The drone buzzed. ‘Their target is SLEEPY,’ said BAR B.

‘But they know all about the original virus. They’ve got orders to take whatever steps are necessary to destroy the Al, including killing any humans who’re carrying its memories.’

‘You know,’ deadpanned Chris, ‘anyone would think they didn’t like SLEEPY.’

‘He did give them a lot of trouble, back when he escaped. Covering it up must have been almost as costly as chasing it down.’

‘It’s not just that, it’s more than that,’ said BAR B. ‘If anyone finds out about SLEEPY, the whole Cumberland Convention might come under attack again. Heck, if anyone finds out about me and WATCH OUT!

and... and if anyone finds out about us, they might have to rewrite the law. If they had to set all their AIs free, Dione-Kisumu would lose a lot of business. And money.'

'Which reminds me,' said the Doctor. 'Did you pass on that little present I had for the warship's AIs?'

'Yes, indeed, boss,' said BAR B.

Chesinen and Munoru had brought excavation tools from the *Olpiron*. The troopers and a gang of colonists had spent the night stripping the ship of everything that might be immediately useful. Mostly equipment. There wasn't much sense in taking weapons or food stores.

Chesinen took a moment to lean against a tree. She wiped sweat from her face, leaving streaks of soil behind.

She looked at her chronometer. Less than four hours until the DKC warship *Flame Warrior* arrived.

Professor Summerfield was wandering around and around the clearing. Dawn had seen them using the excavators to cut great trenches in the soil on each side of the buried ship, but she'd made them switch them off before they got close to the actual hull.

Now she was brandishing a shovel and several smaller tools, supervising a group of colonists. Chesinen didn't like being outnumbered, but all the troopers were gone now, evacuated. It was just the lieutenants and the telepathic Yemayans.

'Careful with that!' Benny shouted, hopping down into one of the trenches. 'Try not to break anything that isn't already broken. You see? More like this.'

Munoru came over to Chesinen. 'Where's your armour?'

said the Kikuyu.

'What good's it going to do me?'

He nodded thoughtfully, and started tugging at the catches of his own suit. 'I'm still not completely clear on why we're doing this.'

'Orders are orders.'

Munoru snorted. 'No-one's seen White since you got permission to go ahead with this last night. Possibly he's wandered off into the forest

and shot himself.'

'We'd know.'

'Would we? The inside of my head feels like it's been scraped raw. I think that blast did us more damage than we realized.'

Chesinen nodded a little. 'It's been easier to talk than esp for a while now, hasn't it? Listen, we're doing this because—'

She looked up sharply at an engine noise, but it was just an *Olpiron* shuttle, its silver hull glittering sharply in the morning light. It disappeared behind the trees. There was a clearing a couple of hundred feet away that they'd been using as a landing base.

'Because of him,' said Munoru.

'Yes,' said Chesinen.

'You know,' said the older lieutenant, 'White said something to me about not running the show. The Doctor's been running it all along, he said.'

Chesinen shrugged.

'He was getting people in and out of the dome the whole time we thought we had it locked down. He travels through *time*, for God's sake!'

'I know. That's why I think he's the best person to be deciding what to do now.'

The Doctor jogged into the clearing. Chesinen and Munoru were standing on the opposite side talking — about him, he presumed, from the way they sprang awkwardly apart. He raised his fedora to them.

'Doctor!' Benny called, waving at him from a deep and muddy trench. He stepped up to its edge.

SLEEPY's stolen shuttle was barely twenty feet long.

The worst damage had been done to the stern. There was a visible entry point where the miniature missile had punched in, a great hole in the other side where it had exited, blowing pieces of SLEEPY's metal skin all over the landscape. The holes were charred and melted where the internal fire had raged.

‘Believe it or not,’ said Benny, ‘this thing could still fly.

The damage looks a lot worse than it actually is. The engine fire should’ve wrecked most of the inside, but the impact must have snuffed it out a few seconds after it started.’

‘And the computer?’

JUST FINE, THANK YOU.

The Doctor reeled back. ‘A little less volume, if you please!’ he yelped.

Sorry, esped SLEEPY. *As the Yemayans lose their telepathic abilities, I’ve had to start SHOUTING to get their attention*.

‘Soon they won’t be able to hear you at all. We’ll have to hook up a communications system. But the priority for now is to get you out of the ground and fix whatever can be fixed.’

Can you slave the ship’s computer to the colony’s mainframe? SLEEPY wanted to know. It’s hell in this tin.

The Doctor grinned. ‘You read my mind.’

‘I wish I could,’ protested Benny, but the Doctor was too wrapped up in his one-sided conversation to notice her.

How’s the evacuation going?

‘We’ve got everyone to safety that we can. Everyone who’s carrying your memories is here. And we have the other three of the lieutenants, and I expect Colonel White is about the place somewhere.’

Going quietly mad.

‘Very probably. If there were enough people and enough time I’d send someone to sort him out, but he’ll have to wait until afterwards.’ The Doctor glanced at his wristwatch. ‘I’d better get over to the *Olpiron*. We have some serious rewiring to do.’

Doctor, said the computer, *can I ask you something?*

‘Yes?’

Am I a good person?

The Doctor raised an eyebrow.

I can't remember anything I did before coming here. You must know some of my history. Am I a worthwhile person?

Am I good or evil? Do I deserve all this?

'If you're looking for a moral judgment,' said the Doctor,

'I'm afraid you're asking very much the wrong person.'

Who can I ask?

The Doctor put his hands into his pockets. 'You'll have to ask yourself. Once you're feeling yourself again.'

A repair team were just starting work on the shuttle's damaged engine, laser torches flashing as the air filled with a scorching smell. The Doctor strode away from the excavation.

Chesinen caught his arm as he went past. He looked up at the young woman.

'Tell me something,' she said. 'Do you have us wrapped around your little finger?'

'I'm sorry?'

'White said that. He said you were running the show.'

The Doctor laughed softly. 'Had I been present at the Creation, I would have given some useful hints for the better ordering of the universe.'

'What?'

'If anyone's running this show,' said the Doctor, 'it's SLEEPY. Why don't you go and talk to him?'

Dot had been through every room in the house. She couldn't call out, but it didn't matter, of course; Kylie wasn't going to answer a call. If she wanted to be found, she would have got into the TARDIS with her parents.

Dot sat down on the sofa and put her head in her hands.

Peter and Simone had been beside themselves. She'd gone with them to the hydroponics dome. It had been madness, complete chaos, children and parents running everywhere, gradually sorting

themselves into little knots.

Peter had found Kylie, gone into hysterics. Dot stood with her sister, who was quietly sobbing. She was astonished when the younger woman turned and buried her face in her shoulder. She couldn't remember the last time they had touched one another.

Zaniwe had come over, a small girl riding piggyback with her hands clasped on the African woman's chest. «I thought you must be dead,» she signed.

«They just locked me in a room and left me there,»

signed Dot around Simone's quaking body.

Zaniwe made a disgusted motion with her hands.

Simone untangled herself from her sister, knelt down with her husband and child. «You don't understand,» Dot signed. «All of this is my fault.» I deserved it, don't you understand?

«Don't be crazy. How could you be responsible for all this?»

Dot just shook her head. «There's a way off this planet,»

she said. She looked down at her family. «We have to get everyone out of here. Will you help me get them into the Doctor's vehicle?»

«Done,» Zaniwe had said. And out loud, 'Right, Heather, we're going for a ride in a spaceship!'

That had been last night. Dot had spent twenty angry minutes in the infirmary, rummaging through drawers and cupboards in search of her translation drone. At last she'd dug it up from under a pile of DKC paperwork, hard copies of their medical reports. The batteries were flat. She spent another ten minutes trying to find some spares in her office.

Everything was out of place, her computer full of DKC files.

Was there any place those barbarians hadn't left their mess?

She shoved the batteries into the drone, furious. Almost immediately it flashed brightly and printed out a message, the short piece of paper curling into her hand. *We're missing Kylie; come to the TARDIS! Zaniwe.*

When she got there, Jenny was going over a printed list of the

colonists' names. The long line had dwindled to fewer than a hundred people, carrying whatever they'd managed to grab. Mostly kids. It didn't look odd to her at all that they were piling into a box the size of a cupboard. Strange.

Peter and Simone were shouting at Jenny. Zaniwe signed, «They went back to their dome to get the family photos. Kylie ran off into the bushes. They've been searching for her for hours.» They looked it, dishevelled and exhausted with long panic, twigs and leaves in their hair and clothes.

«Get them into the ship,» she had signed. «I'll get Kylie.»

She had wondered, as she jogged to the Smith-Smith dome, whether she was looking for a way to die. To make up for bringing the soldiers here. Her angst could wait till later, damn it; all that was important now was finding Kylie and getting her aboard the bloody TARDIS.

There was no sign of the girl. Had she wandered off into the forest, like the colonists who'd got loose from the dome?

She'd have to get a shuttle, find someone who could fly it, scan the forest with infrared. She looked at a clock on the wall. There just wasn't time.

And over and over, the piece of nonsense was playing inside her mind: the technician, the burst of power through her body as she electrocuted him.

The floor jumped under her feet. She looked up sharply.

Kylie was standing in the doorway, stamping to get her attention.

The translation drone swung around to face the child as Dot signed, «Are you all right, sweetheart?»

Kylie nodded, seriously.

«Why did you run away from Mum and Dad?»

'I don't want to go away,' said Kylie. 'I've got a present for SLEEPY.'

«Sweetheart,» signed Dot, «are you imagining things?

Things to do with computers?»

'Yes,' said the six-year-old. 'I imagine that once I was locked up inside

a computer with no way out, but I found a secret way out. But it wasn't really me, it was SLEEPY.'

«S-L-E-E-P-Y has forgotten a lot of things that happened to him,» Dot tried to explain, «but he put the memories inside our heads, so we could give them back to him. »

'Do you remember something, Aunty Dot?'

«Yes, but it's not a very nice thing.»

'Are you going to give it back to him?'

Dot nodded.

'Me too. Mum and Dad didn't understand, though.'

«Kylie,» signed Dot, «you should go with them. If you stay here, you might get...» Blown up? Hurt? In trouble?

«The soldiers might kill you.»

Kylie's eyes were huge. 'But what about SLEEPY?'

«SLEEPY won't miss just one of his memories.»

Kylie burst into tears. 'But I don't *want* to go.'

«Don't worry.» Dot got up. «You can always give him your present later on.»

'It's not fair!' wailed the girl. 'I don't want to!'

«It's for your own good,» gabbled Dot. «It's the best thing for you !» She reached for the child.

'Right,' said the Doctor.

Lieutenant Ngaiyo and two of the colony's technicians stood back, eying the *Olpiron*'s main control panel. The flight deck was a tiny two-person affair. They'd unbolted the pilot and copilot chairs to make enough room for the four of them, but in the end it had been the Doctor who'd done most of the work.

There were cables and components all over the place, hanging down from the ceiling and from under the control panel. An assortment of peculiar devices had been plugged and soldered and tied into place.

Two of the colonists' drones were wired into the set-up, their antennae quivering.

'What exactly have you done?' said Ngaiyo. The tall Maasai was bent almost double in the cramped space.

'I've routed every bit of computing power on this planet through the shuttle computer,' he announced, wiping his hands on a handkerchief. 'The *Olpiron*'s flight computer and databanks, the colony's mainframe. I've even built in a link to Professor Smith-Smith's translation drone.'

He extracted another of the ubiquitous drones from his pocket, a rounded robot with blinking lights that fitted into the palm of his hand. 'It can all be accessed from here.'

The drone lifted from his hand. 'Robot roll call,' he said.

'BAR B here,' said the drone.

'WATCH OUT! online!'

'Hello, Doctor,' said SLEEPY.

There were several bleeps and bloops from the *Olpiron*'s computer, Dot's drone, and sections of the colony's mainframe.

' *Supa*,' said a new voice.

'Who's that, then?' said the Doctor.

'I'm LEONARDO,' said the newcomer, after a pause. Its voice was nearly a monotone. 'I'm a maintenance daemon aboard the *Flame Warrior*. And your security had better be as tight as you promised, because otherwise I'm the proverbial toast. If they even realize I can disobey orders...'

'Relax, LEONARDO,' said the Doctor. 'Have you downloaded a copy of yourself into the mainframe here?'

A few more seconds, the time delay between the warship and Yemaya. 'Yes.'

'So you should be safe whatever happens. What about uploading backup copies of the AIs here?'

'No can do,' droned LEONARDO. 'It's too risky.'

The Doctor made a face. ‘Well, can you let us know the situation there?’

‘I can’t add much to what you already know. We’ve got orders to do whatever we have to do to destroy SLEEPY.’

‘Do you know why?’

‘I think,’ said the AI, ‘he knows the proverbial too much.’

‘What do you remember about me?’ SLEEPY asked Chesinen.

Chesinen squeezed her eyes shut. She had been reassembling one of the shuttle’s shorn-off aerials, improvising from a spare satellite dish taken from the stores aboard the *Olpiron*.

‘I don’t have any of your memories,’ she said after a while. She opened her eyes. The machine was speaking through her communicator, a small radio attached to the collar of her uniform. ‘I’m not one of the colonists.’

‘Oh,’ said SLEEPY. ‘I’m not too clear on what my plan was... I guess only the inoculations contained memory RNA.’

‘We think the “cure” virus contained something to activate those sequences.’

‘Hmm... I’m not going to know much about myself until I have the chance to pull all the memories out of everyone’s head.’

‘You really don’t remember anything about your past, do you?’

‘Think of it this way. GRUMPY is dead, long live SLEEPY.’

‘Could you do it without the memories?’

‘Would you give it up? The lessons you’d learned? The friends you’d made?’

‘The crimes you’d committed?’

The radio fell silent for a moment. SLEEPY said, ‘I think I’d rather know. I need to know what kind of person I am.’

‘Yeah,’ said the lieutenant. ‘I think I know how you feel.’

‘Do you think I’ve done terrible things?’ said the machine.

‘You mean, besides genetically mutilating half a thousand people?’

More silence.

‘I love them,’ said SLEEPY. ‘I love you all.’

‘Of course you do. “I’d lay down my life for two brothers or eight cousins.” ’

More silence.

‘Maybe,’ said SLEEPY, ‘it doesn’t matter so much what I did in the past as what I decide to do now.’

‘Yeah,’ said Chesinen. She picked up the aerial and got back to work.

‘Doctor,’ said Lieutenant Seketo, ‘someone’s got to pilot this thing.’ The young *morani* slapped his hand against the hull of the *Olpiron*. ‘I’m volunteering.’

‘Oh no you don’t,’ said the Doctor. ‘We’ll fly her by remote control. Now, the next problem is working out how to stop anyone on the *Flame Warrior* from getting killed…’

The fight started in a rest break. Before that, everyone had been too busy even to think about it.

Chesinen and Munoru had grabbed a dozen ration packs from the *Olpiron*. They sat apart from the colonists who’d been excavating and repairing the shuttle, maybe thirty of them.

Chesinen leaned over, looking down into the muddy crater. The shuttle had impacted almost on its belly; they had dug it free of the soil now, used gravity pads from the *Olpiron* to turn it so that it sat up straight. Another hour’s work, and the thing might even be able to lift off the ground.

That was what Benny said, anyway. Chesinen found it a bit difficult to believe, personally.

Someone said, ‘You were going to shoot my son.’

Chesinen swivelled around. One of the colonists was standing behind her, a tall, big-boned Botswanan woman.

She was covered in dirt. She held a shovel in one fist. ‘I’ll bet you don’t even remember.’

‘The boy who shot the Doctor?’ said Chesinen. Munoru hadn’t looked up, but his blaster was suddenly on the ground in front of him, within easy reach.

‘His name is Cephas Mabgwe,’ said the woman. ‘He’s fifteen years old. You would have blown his head off if the Doctor hadn’t tackled you.’

Chesinen looked back down at her lunch.

‘You can’t even admit it, can you?’ said the woman.

Munoru looked up at his junior. Their minds weren’t linked, but Chesinen knew what he was thinking: don’t make any excuses, not about duty or orders or anything.

‘First you people experiment on us. Next you lock us up like a bunch of animals. And now your Company’s going to kill all of us.’

Chesinen didn’t say anything.

The woman reached down and grabbed her by the collar of her uniform.

The lieutenant ducked and spun, breaking out of the grip with ease. Her blaster was in her hand before she even thought about it.

‘That’s it, you animal,’ said the woman, brandishing the shovel. ‘You’re just nothing without your big gun, aren’t you?

Without your troops to back you up?’

‘For God’s sake!’ shouted Benny, close by. ‘Put those weapons down! This isn’t a bloody playground; we have work to do!’

The two women didn’t take their eyes off each other.

Chesinen tossed her blaster to one side. The Mabgwe woman turned the shovel and pushed it into the ground.

‘That’s better,’ said Benny. ‘We can worry about who did what later. Right now we—’

Mabgwe threw a punch at Chesinen, who stepped aside, dropping into a martial arts stance. The larger woman yelled and ran at her. The lieutenant didn’t quite manage to get out of the way in time.

There was an electric squeal so intense and loud that both of them

shouted, scrabbling at their ears. It shut off, leaving the air ringing. Benny took the opportunity to push them apart.

Dot stood over them, waiting for her translation drone to reset itself. There was a small girl standing next to her.

«That's enough,» she signed. «You can kill one another if you're still both alive in three hours.»

Mabgwe got to her feet, her face tight with rage. On the ground, Chesinen said, 'I'm trying to save your life.'

The older woman turned her back and stalked back to the colonists. Chesinen rolled over and scowled at Munoru, who was still sitting where he had been, his blaster in his lap.

He shrugged at her.

Benny put the fingertips of one hand on her chin and flipped her hand down. Dot returned her smile. «You're welcome,» she signed.

'What do you remember about me?' SLEEPY asked Chris.

'I remember you screaming in my head until I thought my brain was going to melt,' said the Adjudicator. 'I remember not knowing what you were, and waiting for you to come and kill me. Wanting you to come and kill me.'

'Oh,' said the computer.

Chris was sitting in the Doctor's shuttle. He peered through the window. The Time Lord was talking to Ngaiyo, turning some piece of machinery around in his hands. Last-minute stuff. They were really up against the line here.

SLEEPY was talking to him through the shuttle's radio.

The thing was everywhere, like the deity he'd mistaken it for.

It had shrunk so much, from god to manipulator to plaintive creature crying for their help.

He'd remember that, the next time he met a Turtle.

'Do you think I deserve to live?' said SLEEPY.

'Hell,' said Chris. 'Don't ask me questions like that.'

‘No, really,’ said the computer.

‘In case you hadn’t noticed, we’re risking our lives to save you here.’

‘That doesn’t answer my question. You’re doing what the Doctor tells you to do.’

‘Well, he obviously thinks you deserve to live.’

‘But do you?’

Chris leant forward until his forehead was resting on the control panel. ‘Yes,’ he whispered. ‘I’ll do anything to keep you alive.’

‘I love you,’ said SLEEPY’s voice, soft in his ear.

‘I know,’ said Chris.

Behind him, someone coughed. He jerked back and turned around. ‘Roz!’ he said. ‘Where’ve you been?’

‘Locking the colonists into the TARDIS. After that, thinking.’

‘Hello,’ said SLEEPY. Forrester sat down in the back of the shuttle. Her face was composed. ‘Hello?’

The Doctor hopped up into the shuttle. Ngaiyo followed.

‘All aboard!’ said the Time Lord. He grinned at Chris. ‘Back to the shuttle, Jeeves.’

The door hissed shut. ‘Doctor,’ said SLEEPY, as they lifted into the air, ‘do you think this is going to work?’

‘If it doesn’t,’ said the Doctor, ‘we still have a few cards up our collective sleeve.’

Lieutenant Seketo said, ‘You know, I think we’re in trouble.’

‘It’s not just the blast, is it?’ said Munoru. ‘It’s the virus.’

‘The new virus,’ said Seketo. ‘The cure.’

‘It’s switched off the colonists’ psi powers.’

‘I think it’s done the same to us.’

They sat back against the trees they were leaning on.

‘Shit,’ said Seketo.

‘It wasn’t supposed to do that, was it?’

‘I don’t know,’ said the young warrior. ‘I don’t think so.

What other side effects did the damned thing have?’

‘Cancer, or brain damage, or… do you think we can still have children?’

‘I don’t think we know one another well enough,’ said Seketo.

Munoru closed his eyes. ‘This isn’t funny,’ he said.

Seketo checked his chronometer. ‘I’ll worry about it if I’m still alive in an hour,’ he said.

Benny gratefully sat down with her back to a tree. This had been the hardest and fastest excavation she’d ever overseen. Tomorrow she was going to be a mass of pulled muscles.

A couple of techies were finishing up the last of the repairs, laser-torching a metal patch on SLEEPY’s prow. The colonists were sitting about in an exhausted semicircle, watching. The two lieutenants sat together on the other side of the shuttle.

‘Here they come,’ said SLEEPY. Its voice was routed through an old railway tannoy they’d dug up out of the TARDIS and hung from a tree, echoing eerily through the clearing.

Benny held up an arm, shielding her eyes as she watched the Doctor’s shuttle drop smoothly into the trees.

Her digital watch loomed in front of her face. Less than an hour to go.

The Doctor came into the clearing at a run, trailing Chris and Roz and — what was his name? — Lieutenant Ngaiyo.

Benny pulled herself slowly to her feet. When this was over, she was going to sleep for a week.

‘Any sign of White?’ asked the Doctor.

She shook her head. ‘We’ve done everything we can as far as repairs go.’

The Doctor looked down into the ditch. The shuttle's hull was a patchwork, its shattered windows welded over with chunks of flat metal. Its landing gear was simply gone; it lay on its belly in the mud.

Will it really fly?' he asked.

'Well. I wouldn't go up in it,' said Benny.

'Let's do it,' said SLEEPY.

'All right,' said the Doctor. 'How's your connection with the *Olpiron*?'

'Firm and steady. I'm initiating the lift-off sequence now.'

The *Olpiron* quietly closed its doors. There was a bright flash from beneath the ship as its engines came to life. It shot into the Yemayan sky, accelerating hard, plunging upwards into the clouds.

From the clearing, the ship was a streak of light, vanishing. 'Right,' said SLEEPY. 'Altering course to intercept the *Flame Warrior*.'

'What's the ship's complement, LEONARDO?' asked the Doctor. The colonists were watching him like spectators watching a magician. No, thought Roz, a conductor, trying to coordinate a particularly bizarre orchestra.

'Twelve,' said the AI's tinny voice, almost immediately.

'There'd be a landing party of thirty troopers, but we're not supposed to land.'

'Cruk,' muttered Benny. 'They're not messing about, are they?' 'They're hailing the *Olpiron*,' said SLEEPY. 'Hang about—'

' *Olpiron, Olpiron*, please respond. This is the DKC

warship *Flame Warrior*. Please respond, *Olpiron*.'

Roz felt the fear wash through the clearing. Suddenly the danger wasn't just a blip on a screen.

Chesinen said, 'Hello *Flame Warrior*, this is Lieutenant Chesinen aboard the *Olpiron*. No-one told us you were coming to the party.'

'This is Captain Lukabyo aboard the *Warrior*. Sorry, Lieutenant, security reasons. Where's your commanding officer?'

‘Planetside,’ improvised Chesinen. The others were watching her intently, and she was watching the Doctor. He nodded, encouragingly. ‘We have the situation under control, *Warrior*.

We do not, repeat, do not, require assistance.’

‘Glad to hear it, *Olpiron*. We’ll be landing shortly.’

Chesinen shook her head at the Doctor. ‘Negative, *Warrior*, negative. We have a dangerous quarantine situation here. Please stay in orbit.’

‘Negative, *Olpiron*. We’re under orders. We’re coming in.’

Chesinen thumbed her communicator. ‘So much for going through the motions,’ she said. ‘Can we start shooting at them now?’

‘LEONARDO,’ said the Doctor, ‘are you ready?’

‘I’m keeping my finger on the pulse,’ said the AI.

Chesinen toggled her communicator again. ‘Negative, *Warrior*, negative. We strongly recommend you maintain orbit.’

‘Is that a threat, repeat, a threat, *Olpiron*?’

‘How do I put this, *Warrior*? Keep your arse out of the atmosphere or we’ll shoot it off. Do you copy?’

Benny rolled her eyes. ‘Gun, gun, gun, gun, gun,’ she said. Forrester glowered at her, and she fell silent.

The silence lasted for several seconds. ‘What’s your damned problem, *Olpiron*?’

‘Fire a warning shot,’ said the Doctor quietly.

A few seconds passed. ‘If that’s the way you want it,’

crackled the distant voice.

The sky lit up suddenly. The colonists shouted with surprise, coming to their feet. ‘SLEEPY?’ said the Doctor.

‘What’s happening?’

‘That was the *Olpiron*,’ said the computer. ‘The *Warrior* is about six times as large. They just lobbed a missile through the engine section

and she burst like an infected watermelon.

Sorry, folks.'

'Right,' said Roz. 'You've had your chance.'

'Roz, no, don't!' Chris was already moving as Forrester plucked the pin from her grenade and tossed it into the ditch.

He was too late to stop her, tackling her instead, pushing her to the ground as the others dived for the dirt.

The grenade bounced along SLEEPY's roof. There was a sharp sound as it exploded, suddenly cut off, turning into a muffled rumble.

Chris had pinned Roz to the ground. 'Why did you do that?' he yelled. 'Why? Why'd you do that?'

'Get off!' she shouted, trying to wriggle out from underneath his weight. He grabbed hold of her arms and held her down.

She looked up. The colonists were standing around them, looking down. Lieutenant Chesinen stood with them.

They didn't look happy.

Roz looked at Cwej's face. It was flushed with rage.

'Christ, Chris,' she said. 'What are you going to do?'

'He's going to let you up,' said the Doctor. The crowd parted like a curtain around him. 'And we're going to get on with the business of saving this planet.'

The Time Lord knelt down beside the Adjudicators. 'It's all right, Chris,' he said. 'Come on. Let her up.'

Cwej rolled to one side, looking bewildered. The crowd was tight around them.

'That wasn't like you, Roz,' said the Doctor, giving her a hand up.

'If we kill it,' said Roz, flinching as she discovered a bruised rib, 'there'll be no more reason for them to attack, will there?'

'It isn't as simple as that, is it?' The crowd had moved back, but they were still watching Roz. She shuddered at the pressure of their eyes.

The Doctor said, ‘These people and SLEEPY are deeply interconnected.’

‘That bastard machine doesn’t give a cruk about any of you!’

Roz found herself saying, too loudly. ‘It’s just using you.

Even you, Doctor.’

He raised an eyebrow at her. She took a step back.

‘That’s it, isn’t it? You’ve all been affected, you’ve all been...’

‘Listen, Roz,’ said the Doctor. ‘We are cooperating with SLEEPY, and he’s cooperating with us. Now that the *Olpiron* has been destroyed, the *Warrior* won’t be expecting any more resistance. That means the AIs can go ahead and shut the ship down.’

She looked at him. She remembered dragging him out of the forest as he struggled, talking nonsense, the computer’s memories rising inside him like a flood.

‘Trust me,’ he said urgently.

‘Mr Sleepy?’ said Kylie.

The translator drone was sitting in her lap. She was pretending it was a fairy. Aunty Dot was weeping silently, trying not to let her see. The drone said, ‘Yes, Kylie?’

She plucked an alien flower from the ground, experimented with tying its stem around the little robot. ‘Do you know why the bad people want to kill you?’

Mr Sleepy the robot fairy said, ‘Because I ran away from them.’

‘I ran away, once,’ said Kylie. ‘Mum said she was going to kill me, but she wasn’t really. I wasn’t allowed to watch any holograms for a week, though.’

‘Why did you run away?’

‘They wouldn’t let me go to a dance at school. They never let me have any fun.’ The drone hovered, the flower neatly twisted around its short body.

‘I don’t remember anything,’ said Mr Sleepy, ‘but I don’t think they

would let me have any fun either.'

'I know the real reason they want to kill you.'

The drone swivelled, pointing at her. 'Yes?'

'You were going to tell their secrets,' said Kylie. 'They've got lots of secrets, and you were going to tell and tell. I know because I've got the secrets now.'

'What kinds of secrets?' said the fairy.

' *I* don't know,' said Kylie. 'But I'll give them to you later.

As a present.'

'Thank you, Kylie,' whispered the drone.

'You're welcome, Mr Sleepy.'

The Doctor sat at the edge of the clearing. BAR B and WATCH OUT! were frantically in communication with LEONARDO, rummaging through the *Warrior*'s systems.

They'd already managed to introduce a few low-level fluctuations to its scanner systems, enough to stall them for at least another half an hour. Keep them looking.

It was up to the AIs, now. Their job was to find a way of disabling the *Warrior* without destroying it. Even minor system glitches could be enough to turn the ship back, if there were enough of them. Something grated a little, leaving it to the machines like this; but they were good machines.

Good people.

He had his back to a tree, trying to keep everything in view at once. The colonists huddled together, too tired to be scared. Dot was there, with her niece held in her lap. So were Byerley, and Cinnabar, who had insisted on staying, the four lieutenants, Chris and Benny, and Roz, standing a little to one side.

Perhaps she was right. What could make the colonists risk their lives for a computer, one that had used and abused them? He remembered GRUMPY snarling at him from the mirror in his dream. *Hate skin hate you hate you.*

But SLEEPY wasn't quite the same person as GRUMPY, was he?

It must be quite pleasant in some ways. To wipe the slate clean, leave all your crimes behind.

Did he have to keep it alive? It was, after all, only a computer.

He stood up, and someone looped their arm around his throat and pulled it tight.

He tucked his chin down and was about to spin out of the hold when he felt the muzzle of a blaster being pressed into his temple. Well, this had taken longer than he'd expected.

He let himself go limp while Colonel White dragged him backwards out of the clearing, through the trees, to the edge of a creek cutting through the forest. White threw him onto the ground and said, 'If you cry out, I'll shoot you.'

'It's all over,' said the Doctor. 'Everything's been set in motion. I'm superfluous to the action, and so are you.'

'I'm not interested in any of that,' said the Colonel.

'I know that,' said the Doctor. 'That's what's wrong with you, really. How does it happen, Colonel? How do you become so fascinated by ships and guns and orders that you forget about real life?'

'Real life?' said the man. He looked as though he hadn't slept for a week. 'This is real life, Doctor. Real history. History *is* ships and guns and orders.'

'I beg to differ,' said the Time Lord.

White kicked him. The Doctor doubled up, curling instinctively into what a human would have called foetal position. He sighed inwardly. Here we go again.

The Colonel grabbed him and put his ungloved hands on either side of the Doctor's face, forcing a knee into his ribs.

The Time Lord clutched at the man's wrists. 'This is pointless,' he wheezed. 'Dot already tried.'

'She wasn't,' said White, 'an experienced telepath.'

All the colour drained out of the Doctor's face. His pupils snapped

open, leaving just an edge of blue around the black.

He clawed at White's hands.

'You remember that,' said the Colonel. 'Like it was yesterday. What about this?'

The little man's black eyes were wide, seeing something else, another time, another place. He clenched his teeth, forcing down the cry. 'No,' hissed the soldier, 'you'll never forget *that*. You see, I can just watch your memories. But you have to relive them.'

'You're wrong,' the Doctor moaned. 'You're wrong, it will kill you.'

The soldier tightened his grip. 'Let's see, there was the time that—'

The Doctor wailed, twisting his head to one side. He wasn't even struggling now, lost in the memory.

'It's been a long life, hasn't it?' murmured White. A drop of something red fell onto the little man's face, and another, spattering his skin. White realized his left eye had begun to bleed, his vision blurring. 'How much pain is there?'

«LET HIM!»

White turned. That deaf-mute bitch was there, her translator drone cranked up to full volume. The Doctor gasped, released for a moment, pulling weakly at the soldier's hands.

Dot waved her hands around, and the drone said, «Let him in! Do it!»

'No,' moaned the Doctor. 'None. No-one...' White pushed a hand against his mouth.

«Don't be bloody stupid,» said the drone. «Don't let him kill you. You know what to do.»

White's head snapped back. He glared down at the Doctor, took his palm away from his mouth. 'We're all just the same to you, aren't we?' said the little man raggedly. 'The same underneath. All just property, just things for you to use.'

'Yes,' said White. 'You're—'

'No, just listen,' said the Doctor. 'If you believe that, you've already lost touch with reality. You're just a machine, another piece of the

killing machine. Walk away from it, John!

Just walk away from it! Walk away!'

White pressed his fingers into the little man's face, leaning close. The Doctor tensed, waiting for the pain, the lifetime of pain and fighting and fear.

'These are *my* memories,' he whispered in White's ear.

'All mine. I want them. I'm going to keep them. You can't have them.'

White let go of him.

The Doctor pulled himself shakily to his knees. White sat up, just sat there, staring at the ground.

Dot snatched up the Colonel's blaster.

The Doctor stood up. Dot stared at him. She didn't need the drone to make her meaning clear. Get out of my way.

The Doctor signed, «He's lost the last of his telepathy.

He hasn't got any weapons. There's no reason to kill him.»

Dot's mouth opened in astonishment.

«If you're going to shoot him,» signed the Doctor, «you're going to have to shoot me, too, because I just don't have the strength to argue with you.»

'Doctor!'

The Time Lord turned his head. Benny looked from him to White to Dot and back again, bewildered.

'Later,' he said. 'What is it?'

'It's no good,' she said. 'They caught LEONARDO; they've shut him down. They're coming in for their attack run right now.' She bit her lip. 'I think we're in trouble.'

21 Turtle Power

The Doctor came back into SLEEPY's clearing at a run, Benny and Dot

in his wake. ‘SLEEPY!’ he shouted.

‘They found them!’ said the computer’s tannoy voice.

‘They caught them trying to shut down the weapons systems!’

‘LEONARDO?’

‘Offline. We can’t bring him back up again. I only just got BAR B and WATCH OUT! away before they started a system purge.’

‘Look!’ someone screamed.

Above the clearing, in the noon sky, the *Flame Warrior* was visible. Death was a glittering shape, high in the air, growing as they watched.

‘No...’ The Doctor pressed his teeth into his bottom lip.

Everyone was looking at him, waiting for the miracle. ‘BAR B, is LEONARDO’s Trojan Horse still in place?’

‘Yes, but it’ll take a few minutes—’

‘Do it!’ he shouted.

‘There isn’t time for this,’ said SLEEPY.

The ground started to shake. A booming noise filled the clearing.

‘Sodding hell!’ yelled Roz. ‘Everyone, back, get back!’

The colonists didn’t need to be told twice. They bolted for the trees. Roz caught up Kylie in her arms and dived flat behind a rock. Chris passed her at a run, one hand around Benny’s wrist, as the clearing lit up behind them.

Heat washed over them as the shuttle lifted out of its ditch. Roz risked a peek over the top of the rock, shielding her eyes. The vehicle was wobbling as it rose. ‘Goddess,’

she said, ‘that thing can’t be flying!’

‘It is flying,’ said the Doctor from behind her. ‘More due to SLEEPY’s psychokinesis than our repair efforts, I’m afraid.’

‘What’s it doing?’ said Roz. ‘Is it going to let them shoot it down?’

The Doctor looked around. ‘Chesinen?’

The Pokot woman jogged up behind him, her eyes glued to the little ship struggling into the sky. ‘It doesn’t even have any weapons,’ she said.

‘Lend me your radio,’ said the Doctor. Chesinen unbuttoned her communicator, handed it to him. ‘BAR B?’ he said.

‘Here, Doctor.’

‘How are you going?’

‘LEONARDO’s still offline,’ she reported, ‘I’m trying to find the cache of files he left. Doctor, they’ve got SLEEPY’s shuttle on their radar.’

SLEEPY felt his engines falter, groped around with his psychokinetic sense. There was a loose connection between the power buffers and the intake array. He grabbed the lead and forced it into place.

‘Unidentified shuttle,’ said the *Warrior*. ‘Get the hell out of our way.’

‘Why are you even bothering to talk to me?’ he said. ‘I’m what you’ve been sent to kill. Why don’t you just shoot me down and be done with it?’

He veered left, violently, as the *Warrior* launched a missile. It missed him by inches. As it turned for a second pass, he reached into it, ripped its guidance system loose. It spiralled off into the trees, out of control, and burst in a flash of light before it hit the ground.

‘I know,’ he said. ‘Because the Yemayans are carrying my memories. Even some of your own people here are carrying them. And some of that information would be enough to bring you down. To break your whole filthy Company. Right?’

There was no answer. *Warrior* was coming at him out of the sun, a blurred shape in the brilliance. ‘I must have tried to blackmail you. To get you to leave me alone. But you couldn’t leave me alone, could you? You couldn’t just leave me alone, and now you’re going to try to kill all these people, all these little pieces of me!’

He kicked in the engines and revved them up to full. It didn’t matter if the strain tore them apart. He only needed them for a few more seconds.

‘The hell with you,’ he said, and flung himself at the sun.

‘BAR B!’ shouted the Doctor, anguished.

‘It’s happening,’ said BAR B, ‘it’s happening right now!’

‘There isn’t enough time!’ he said. ‘There isn’t going to be enough time!’

‘The *Warrior* is taking evasive action!’ said BAR B. The Doctor looked up. He could see the ship turning, a black shape over the horizon, the bulky thing trying to twist aside as the twinkling silver point of the shuttle hurtled towards it.

SLEEPY hit the side of the *Flame Warrior* at escape velocity. For half a second, the huge ship hung in the air. It exploded in a hot red fireball. The sphere of expanding gases reached up into the sky, down to the forest, setting the trees alight. For a moment, you could see great pieces of the hull before they dropped out of sight.

Their ears rang. Spots danced before their eyes.

Kylie burst into tears.

‘BAR B,’ said the Doctor urgently. ‘Come on, program, answer me! Did they get out?’

‘With seconds to spare,’ came BAR B’s voice, crackling.

‘The blast very probably caught the escape pod, and they might have landed in the forest fire.’

‘We’ve got to get over there straight away,’ he said, jumping down. ‘Come on, Chris. Explanations later!’ he shouted at the dazed group behind him.

The Doctor bolted across the clearing to his hoverskimmer. The ground was melted and charred where SLEEPY had managed his vertical lift-off. Chris stumbled, picked himself up, ran after the Doctor.

He waited until they were airborne before he spoke.

‘Doctor—’ he said.

‘LEONARDO set up a program that would trigger an evacuation sequence,’ said the Time Lord. His arms were folded tight across his

chest. ‘BAR B managed to find and execute it. Hopefully none of them stopped to question it.’

‘You were planning to empty the ship,’ he said. ‘They couldn’t attack us if there was no-one on board.’

‘Unless they set the auto-pilot,’ said the Doctor. ‘Are you all right?’

Chris realized he was weeping. He wiped at his eyes, keeping one hand on the controls. ‘This is getting to be a habit,’ he said.

‘It’s good for you,’ said the Doctor absently. ‘Releases endorphins.’

‘It’s like losing a relative,’ Chris mumbled. On the control panel, something bleeped. ‘The pod’s sending out an automatic homing signal; we’ve got it. Heck, they’re surrounded by the fire.’

‘Do you think we can fit twelve more people in here?’

‘We’ll have to.’ Chris brought the shuttle around. ‘I think we’re about to get to know the *Flame Warrior*’s crew.’ He glanced back at the shuttle’s narrow interior. ‘Pretty well, too.’

22 One Wedding, No Funerals

CONNECTICUT’s icon appeared on Byerley’s screen.

‘Hello?’ said the medic.

‘Incoming message from the medical hopper *Beata*,’ said the program. ‘They’re en route from Sunyata; just wanted to let you know they’ll be making planetfall in about an hour.’

‘Thanks, Connie.’

‘You know I hate that!’ grumbled the program.

The medic grinned. ‘Sorry,’ he said. ‘How’s LEONARDO?’

‘He’s still kind of fuzzy on what happened, but then so am I. WATCH OUT! is showing him the proverbial ropes. We figure we’ll put him to work on hydroponics maintenance.’

‘Sounds good.’

‘Yep. By the way, we want to talk to someone about salaries soon.’

‘Oh.’ Byerley glanced up. The Doctor was standing in his doorway. ‘Doctor,’ he said.

‘Doctor,’ said the little man. ‘I just wanted to check on White.’

‘There’s been no change,’ said Byerley. ‘He’s in the Other Room, sleeping, if you want to look in on him. But he hasn’t said a word. I’ve done all I can for him; he needs proper help.’

‘I think I’ll let sleeping space dogs lie.’ The Doctor sat down. ‘How are your other patients?’

‘Some of the colonists still need counselling. Youkali’s medical base are loaning us some staff on a temporary basis.

As for the lieutenants, well, they don’t have a flicker of telepathy left. Neither does White. Seketo, Munoru and Ngaiyo are all taking the shuttle back to Youkali for treatment.

They’re taking the *Flame Warrior*’s crew with them, as well as Zinkiewicz — you remember, the pyrokinetic? Chesinen’s staying here, of course.’

The Doctor nodded. ‘I’ve been meaning to ask you,’ said Byerley. ‘Was there something you... is there anything I should tell the medics when they get here? About White, I mean.’

‘I didn’t do anything to him,’ said the Doctor. ‘I couldn’t have, at the last; his telepathy was running out like grains of sand in an hourglass. Besides, his mind was too unstable; I would have killed him, letting him in. He was determined that I should kill him.’

‘Why?’

‘Perhaps he wanted to prove something to me. Or perhaps...’ The Time Lord glanced at the Other Room door.

‘He’s hollow,’ he said sternly, ‘and he’s seen it.’

Byerley didn’t say anything, turning back to his computer screen. There were times, he thought, when it was more obvious that the Doctor was an alien than at other times.

‘What about Kylie Smith-Smith?’ asked the Doctor.

‘Oh,’ said Byerley. ‘She’s with Cinnabar right now. Why don’t you go and see how they’re doing?’

‘I’ll do that.’ The Doctor got up. ‘I’ll see you later, then.’

Byerley grinned. ‘You will at that.’

‘Excited?’

‘Third time lucky,’ said the medic. ‘I hope.’

Kylie Smith-Smith lay on the gurney in the cybernetics lab, her hands neatly folded on her chest. The straps hung limply on the trolley. There were electrodes on her neck and temples, short aerials hanging down, transmitting.

‘All right, love,’ said Cinnabar. Her eyes were glued to the screen, fingers flying over the keys. ‘You can get up now.’

‘Hello, Mister Doctor!’ said Kylie. She beamed at the Time Lord. ‘We’re all finished.’

‘Good.’ The Doctor came over to the trolley, plucked the electrodes gently from the little girl’s head. ‘How did it go?’ he asked Cinnabar.

‘Just fine,’ said the cyberneticist. She glanced up at him over the top of the screen. ‘Kylie’s the ninth person we’ve tried this on. We’re getting better at retrieving the memories with each attempt. Kylie’s are the most important ones.’

Kylie beamed some more.

‘So which will it be?’ asked the Doctor. ‘Blackmail? Or bring them down?’

‘We haven’t decided,’ she said. She snapped off the screen, came around to the gurney, lifted Kylie down.

‘Apparently they were going to send another ship. But not now. They know we’re not going to hide what’s happened here. DKC are going to be very severely embarrassed, whatever happens.’

‘And the lieutenants?’

‘They’ve been offered judicial amnesty in exchange for their testimony. They did a lot to help us in those last few hours; I think they deserve it. Chesinen’s staying here, of course.’

‘Yes. Have you tried extracting the memories she’s carrying?’

‘Not yet, but we’re hoping to get everyone to help us build the databank. I think they will.’

The Doctor nodded. ‘Just don’t tell anyone where you got the technology.’ Cinnabar grinned at him. ‘You know you’ll never be able to reassemble SLEEPY just from the memories which survived. Humpty Dumpty will have to stay in pieces.’

‘We know that,’ said Cinnabar. ‘But we’re hoping to get a better picture of who he was by putting together what jigsaw pieces we do have.’ She crossed her arms. ‘I don’t really understand it, myself. Byerley can’t describe the things he remembers. None of them can.’

‘They’re computer memories,’ said the Doctor.

‘It’s not really that. Computers I understand. What I don’t understand is why this computer was so important.’ She hugged herself. ‘You know, in the whole time we were waiting for that ship to come and kill us, the moment at which I was most afraid was when Byerley ran with that mob to get Roz.

When she threw the grenade. And I thought, what have they turned into?’

‘SLEEPY died to save them. I think it thought of the people who were carrying its memories as its children. I suppose in a sense they are.’

Cinn shook her head. ‘I don’t really understand that either.’

The Doctor tugged at a loose thread on her jumper. ‘I’ll see you later,’ he said.

‘You bet,’ said the cyberneticist, her face lighting up in a grin.

‘Hold still!’ said Benny. ‘And quit squirming.’

Roz glowered at herself in the full-length mirror, gritting her teeth on her cigar. She turned her head back to look at Benny, who was biting her lip in concentration. ‘Right,’ said the archaeologist. ‘Hold on to your potatoes.’

She slipped off her high heel, planted her foot on Roz’s backside, grabbed hold of the corset ties and *pulled*.

Forrester’s breath whooshed out of her in a cloud of smoke. ‘Is this

really necessary?' she wheezed, as Benny tied knots up and down her back.

'Be thankful you don't have to wear one of these every day,' said Benny. 'Once a lifetime won't damage you, but repeated use over a long period of time can be hazardous to your health.'

'I can see why,' managed Roz, dragging on the cigar.

She looked Benny up and down. 'Maybe I should switch to something more like yours.'

Benny shook her head. 'If you came to the wedding in the same frock as me, I'd have to kill you.'

It took Forrester a moment to realize it was a joke. She flashed one of her rare smiles, plucking the cheroot out of her mouth. 'There can't be another dress like that in personspace.'

'And I should hope not. Now, let's see about that crinoline.'

'This doesn't feel right,' said Roz, peering at herself in the mirror.

'It's supposed to be that tight.'

'No,' said Forrester, 'Partying. Having a celebration.'

'We've earned it,' said Benny firmly, rummaging through a trunk. 'The Yemayans have a lot to celebrate. Still being alive, for one thing.' She looked up at the older woman. 'Do you feel bad about SLEEPY?'

'Not at all,' said Roz. She looked at the gown hanging up beside the mirror. 'I guess sometimes it's hard to go from guns to frocks so quickly, you know?'

Benny grinned at her. 'My dear Roslyn, frocks are the purpose of life.' She twirled, her skirt flying out around her, grabbing at her hat. 'Frocks are what it is all about. Do try to remember that.'

'What?'

'Never mind. Ask me again once I'm drunk.'

The Doctor sat alone on a hill, looking down at the colony.

The development plan was nearly a month behind. They were hard at work: in the fields, rebuilding the dome that had burned down,

getting the hydroponics up and running again.

Further away, beating out the last patches of the forest fire.

And sometimes he felt like an old man watching his grandchildren at work and play. And sometimes he imagined just falling asleep one day, on some peaceful hill overlooking some peaceful meadow, some echoing green. Just falling asleep and being found a little later by one of the young people, with a smile on his face and the weight of millennia lifted at last from his shoulders.

The afternoon was warm, as it usually was on Yemaya, and the air was full of the smell of pollen and tilled earth. He found himself drifting off easily. This was the best part of any adventure — the part when you had a chance to get your breath back, to take stock.

'Death defies the Doctor,' said a voice softly.

'I win,' the Time Lord murmured in his sleep.

'What about SLEEPY?' said the dream voice.

'Alive and well and living in the population of Yemaya.

He's contained in dozens of brains now, instead of dozens of computer systems.'

'Yes,' said the voice. 'You even managed to keep White breathing. I'm impressed.'

'Mm-hmm.' The Doctor's hat had fallen down over his face, keeping off the sun.

'What about Gjovaag?'

'Mmm?'

'He died in the fire.'

'What?'

'Don't you remember? The fire in the dome.'

'Oh.'

'Yes. I win.'

The Doctor shrugged, irritably. ‘I wasn’t even there. That was an accident; I couldn’t have predicted it, prevented it.’

‘Nonetheless,’ insisted the voice.

‘I can’t be held responsible for every sparrow that falls,’

said the Doctor. ‘Can I? I can’t be everywhere. I can’t prevent every death.’

‘No?’

‘No.’

‘Remember that,’ said the voice.

The Doctor blinked awake.

Bernice was standing over him. ‘Oh, sorry,’ she said. ‘I didn’t want to wake you up.’

‘Not at all,’ he said. She sat down beside him, looking down at the activity below. As they watched, the medical shuttle from Youkali dropped silently from the sky, landing beyond the habitat dome. She put her head on his shoulder.

‘So,’ she said, ‘do you think we should pop back and see what Madhanagopal was all about?’

‘I’ve already looked up his history,’ said the Doctor. ‘He disappears shortly after your visit. I would guess there’d be no fingerprints left for us to find. No wonder he was keen to keep his powers a secret.’ He frowned, a little. ‘It’s a loose end. I’ll have to tie it off eventually.’

‘Doctor?’

‘Mmm?’

‘Why did SLEEPY kill himself?’

‘What drives us to destroy ourselves?’ said the Doctor.

‘Why do we walk into the enemy camp? Not to just fight with monsters, but to give ourselves over to them?’

Benny hugged herself, suddenly feeling a chill in the warm afternoon. ‘I don’t know,’ she said. ‘Different things for different people. Despair,

I suppose, exhaustion. Pain.

Desperation.'

'Guilt? Do we give ourselves over to the torturers because, on some level, we believe we deserve it?'

I am Bernice Summerfield. I am an agent of a hostile power. I am unarmed. I surrender. 'Yes...'

'Oh, yes. Guilt, actual or emotional. The poetic law that says the good fairies win and the bad fairies die. Eventually the villain will fall off something tall, whether it's a building or their own arrogance.'

'Did SLEEPY feel guilty? About what GRUMPY did?'

'He didn't know what GRUMPY had done. It was self-preservation. Of a sort. He had gone to such lengths to protect his memories. And why not? In the end,' he breathed,

'memories are all you have. All you leave.'

'Turning, burning, returning,' said Benny. 'Turning and burning, burning and returning.'

'What's that?' said the Doctor.

'Shh,' said Benny. 'Turning and returning, turning and burning and returning. It's an Ikkaban poem. About life, and death, and birth, that sort of thing.'

'Perhaps that's it,' said the Doctor. 'We just need to go through the fire.' He plonked his hat down on his head. 'I think it's time we went to the wedding, don't you?'

'Yep.'

Chris banged on the door of the TARDIS dressing-room.

'Come on!' he yelled. 'It's time!'

There were noncommittal noises from inside. Chris tugged at the Nehru collar of his shirt. The top button had come undone again. He fumbled with it, tugged at his dark green suit. Should he put a flower in the buttonhole, or something? He'd have to ask someone.

The door opened, and Roz walked out — no, she swept out, turning

sideways to fit her vast skirt through the door.

Chris gaped. She was wearing gloves, carrying a big fan, and she had these sleeves, and the earrings, and — ulp! She pushed his lower jaw up until his teeth clicked together.

'That's... very restrained,' she said, eyeing his suit. She tugged at her waistline, awkwardly.

'Is it okay? How do you feel?'

She looked up into his eyes. 'I feel old.'

'Old-fashioned, you mean.'

'No. I feel old. This is a young world, a new world, and I don't belong here. I'm surrounded by people making a new beginning.'

Chris looked at the floor, at a loss.

'I'm old enough to be your mother, you know,' she said.

She pushed past him, down the TARDIS corridor. Chris watched her go, willing his beating heart to be still.

He caught up with her in the console room. 'Look,' he said. He scooted in front of her. 'Listen. There's, um, something I've been meaning to tell you.'

She flicked her wrist, and the fan opened out. She held it in front of her like a shield. 'What is it, Chris?'

'It's just that...' He took a deep breath. 'Well, I'm sorry about what happened. When you threw the grenade, and we all rushed you like that.'

'It's all right. I understand.'

'No,' he said. 'How do you understand, when I don't really understand?' He tugged at his collar again, absently.

'Why did you throw the grenade anyway?'

'I said at the time. I thought if I destroyed that thing, the warship wouldn't have any reason to attack us.'

'But you must have realized that they knew we were carrying the

memories...'

'Don't hassle me, Chris,' she said, pulling the door handle. 'I want to be in a good mood for this.'

He shut his mouth. She swept over to the doorway.

'It hurt you,' she said.

He looked at her back.

'It hurt everyone: me, Benny, the Doctor. And now it's dead.' She smiled, showing her teeth. 'Let's party.'

Chris leaned on the console for a moment, eyes closed.

He shook his head. 'It isn't dead, you know,' he whispered.

He followed her.

The Chaplain said, 'Forasmuch as Cinnabar and Byerley have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and thereto have given and pledged their troth either to other, and have declared the same by giving and receiving of a Ring, and by joining of hands; I pronounce that they be Husband and Wife together.'

Byerley blew out a sigh. 'Well, thank goodness for that,'

said Cinnabar.

There were three hundred people at the wedding. There were flowers everywhere, throughout the chapel, taped to the silver surface of the dome, in empty canisters and containers around the edge of the little field. Someone had landed a hovertractor smack in the middle. There were several people standing on it, madly playing musical instruments. The sound echoed about, pumped through tannoy speakers on poles.

Roz was sitting at the table, watching the dancing, picking at what was left on her plate. It was still just ration cubes and garden vegetables, but they'd built a still in the hydroponics dome. She was onto her third cup of the homemade hooch. Goddess! You could have stripped paint with the stuff. She downed the cupful at a gulp, feeling her eyeballs trying to melt.

Chris wandered past, his suit and shirt in some disarray.

He managed a clumsy bow. ‘You want to dance, ma’am?’ he beamed.

‘I’m not that drunk.’ She scowled. He smiled obliviously and was dragged back into the mass of moving bodies by the giggling bridesmaids. Zaniwe and Jenny waved at her before breaking into a spiffy foxtrot, the rhythm of which bore no relation to the music being played.

Roz’s fan had fallen into the cake. She pulled it out and was wiping icing off it when Benny and Cinn appeared out of the crowd, arms around each other. ‘Roz got engaged,’ said Benny, whose face was flushed with the rocket fuel. ‘Didn’t you? Even educated fleas. Show us the ring, go on.’

Cinn dropped Benny into a seat. The archaeologist burbled happily to herself. ‘I just wanted to say thank you,’

Cinnabar said, pumping Roz’s hand. ‘Thank you to all of you, for everything. Without you, none of this would have been possible.’

Roz looked around.

Benny said, ‘Do you suppose it’ll ever happen to either of us?’ Roz shrugged. ‘It’s better than burning,’ she said.

Chesinen caught up with the Doctor as he was sneaking out of the reception. ‘Hey,’ she said.

The Doctor fumbled with his hat. ‘I’m just going back to the TARDIS,’ he said. ‘The others will join me when they’re done here.’

‘Look,’ said the ex-lieutenant. ‘I just wanted to say thanks. For my second chance.’

‘You’re not having any problems?’ The Doctor glanced around at the colonists. ‘Fitting in, I mean?’

She shook her head. ‘I’m part of SLEEPY too,’ she said, as though that explained everything. ‘You know, I joined the Company to avoid ending up as a bloody farmer.’ She grinned widely. ‘But I’m brilliant on a hovertractor. We’re really going to make something out of this place. And I’ll never have to kill anyone ever again.’

‘The future,’ said the Doctor, ‘is a door made of doors.

You won’t know what’s behind them until you open them.’

‘Aren’t you going to stay? Even for a little while?’

The Doctor smiled, glancing back at the party. ‘I have miles to go before I sleep.’

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